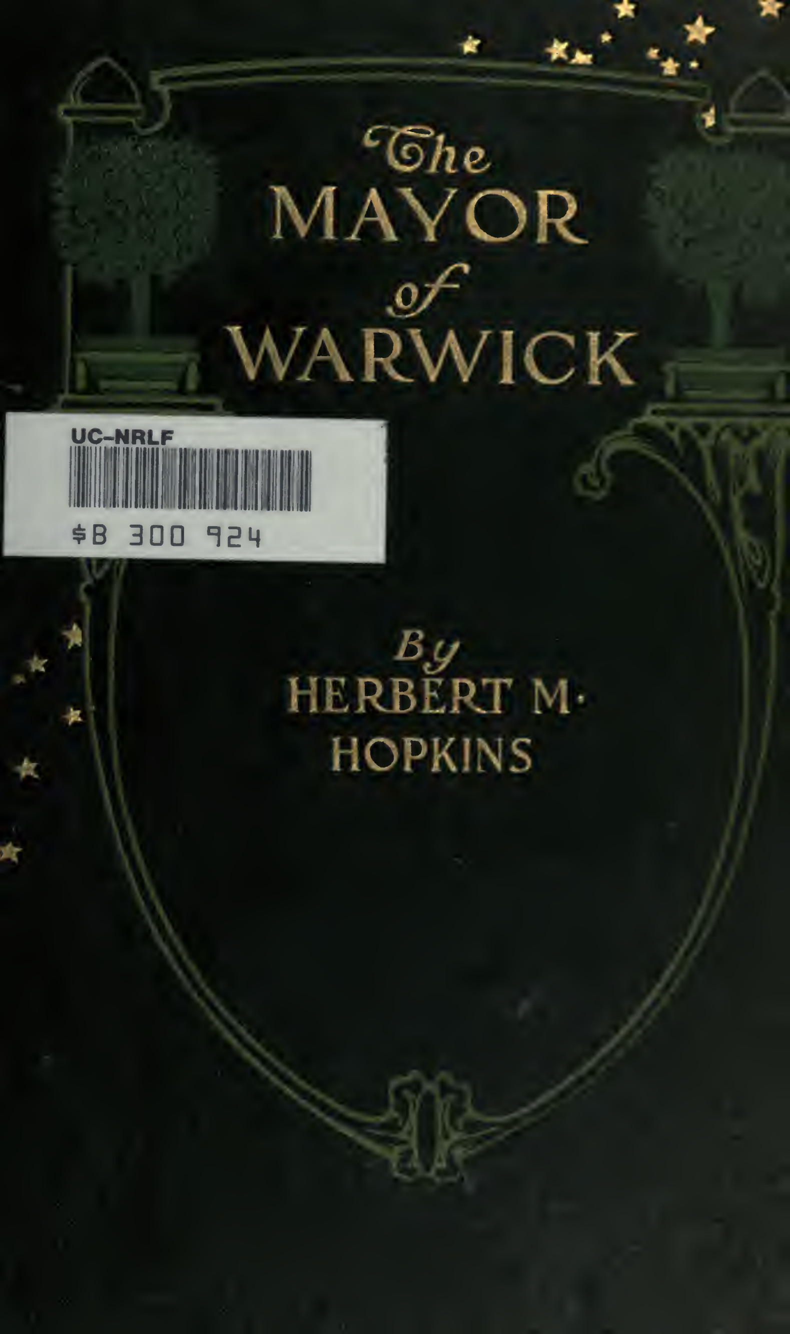

The MAYOR of WARWICK

By
HERBERT M.
HOPKINS

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THE MAYOR OF WARWICK

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MAYOR OF WARWICK

BY

HERBERT M. HOPKINS

AUTHOR OF "THE FIGHTING BISHOP"

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
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THE MAYOR OF WARWICK

CHAPTER I

THE MEETING IN THE MAPLE WALK

ST. GEORGE'S HALL, situated on a high hill overlooking the city of Warwick, was still silent and tenantless, though the long vacation was drawing to a close. To a stranger passing that way for the first time, the building and the surrounding country would doubtless have suggested the old England rather than the new. There was something mediæval in the massive, castellated tower that carried the eye upward past the great, arched doorway, the thin, deep-set windows, the leaded eaves and grinning gargoyles, into the cool sky of the September morning.

The stranger, were he rich in good traditions, would pause in admiration of the pure collegiate-gothic style of the low hall that extended north and south three hundred feet in either direction from the base of the great tower; he would note the artistry of the iron-braced, oaken doors, flanked at the lintels by inscrutable faces of carven stone, of the windows with their diamonded panes of milky glass peeping through a wilderness of encroaching vines. Nor would this be all. Had he ever viewed the quadrangles of Oxford and Cambridge, he might be able to infer that here, on this sunny plateau above the hill, devoted men, steept in the traditions of old England, had endeavoured to reproduce the plan of one of her famous colleges.

He would see, perhaps, that only one side of the quadrangle was built, one fourth of the work done. Here, along the northern line, should be the chapel, its altar window facing the east; on the southern, the dining-hall, adorned with rafters of dark oak and with portraits of the wise and great. To complete the plan, the remaining gap must be closed by a hall similar in style to the one already built.

He might picture himself standing in the midst of this beautiful creation of the imagination, taking in its architectural glories one by one, until his eye paused at the eastern gateway to note the distant landscape which it framed. And then, if he were in sympathy with the ideals of which this building was the outward expression, he would wake from his constructive reverie to realise sadly for the first time, not the beauty, but the incompleteness, of the institution; not its proximity to the city beyond, but its air of aloofness from the community in which it stood.

About ten o'clock of the morning in which this story begins, a stranger, not quite such an one as we have imagined, left the car at the foot of the long hill and turned his face for the first time towards

St. George's Hall. As he passed up the shaded street along the northern side of the campus, his keen, blue-grey eyes swept eagerly the crest on which stood the institution that was destined to be the scene of his professional labours for at least a year, perhaps for many years, it might be, for life. Even a casual glance at the tall, loosely hung figure of the young man, at his clean-cut features and firm mouth, at the nervous, capable hand that grasped his walking-stick as if it were a weapon, would reveal the type claimed by America as peculiarly her own. It was evident that he possessed energy and endurance, if not the power of the athlete. His expression was intellectual, and shrewd almost to hardness; yet somewhere in his eyes and in the corners of his mouth there lurked a suggestion of sweetness and of ideality, that gave the whole personality a claim to more than passing interest and regard.

This curious blending of opposite traits, of shrewdness and of ideality, was illustrated by his thoughts as he strode along, making no more of the hill than he would have made of level ground. Nothing escaped his eye or failed of its impression upon his mind. Fresh from the teeming life of a large university, he noted the absence of students from the steps of the fraternity houses on his right, though it lacked but three days of the opening of the college. Already his own university had felt the first wave of the incoming class, a class that would doubtless contain four times as many students as the total membership of St. George's Hall. Instinctively he searched his mind for an explanation of this lack of growth in an institution that numbered nearly one hundred years of life. What was the defect? Where was the remedy? He jumped at once to the conclusion that both were discoverable, and dimly foresaw that the discovery might be his own.

He approached the scene where he was himself to be on trial in the spirit of one who questioned, not his fitness for the place he was to occupy, for of that he had no shadow of doubt, but the fitness of the place for him. If he saw promotion, perhaps the presidency, within his grasp, he might deem it worth his while to stay; if not, his professorship should be a stepping-stone to something better. With the history, the traditions, and the ideals of the Hall he was but slightly acquainted; in fact, the institution existed for him at present only in its relation to himself and his possible future.

And yet, beneath these thoughts of self ran a current of feeling or impressions which never rose high enough in his consciousness to win definite recognition. If his first view of the college was depressing because of the failure of fruition its appearance suggested, he was not utterly unappreciative of the pictorial effect: the splendid lines of dignity and beauty; the soft brown colour of the stone, relieved by the lighter tone of lintel and window-frame and sill; the dark green of the ivy; the great, black shadow of the tower on the slated roof where every jutting dormer window threw its lesser shade; the wide sky beyond, of a blueness which an artist would have wished to paint.

From the meadow below the plateau came the tinkle of cow-bells, musical in the distance; and this sound, combined with the note of a bird and the voices of children from an unseen garden, produced an Arcadian atmosphere which even the harsh gong of the returning electric car could not dispel.

As he climbed higher, the houses fell away, disclosing the bare hilltop over which the road seemed to dip down and disappear; and though he knew it could not be so, he was half expectant of the sea when he should have lifted his head above the verge. Instead, he saw a wide and shallow valley, rich in the varied products of the autumn, with here and there a bare, reaped field, with many a white farmhouse and barn of red or grey, till his eye followed the road to the western hill line and noted a patch of small, white objects which might be a group of boulders left by a prehistoric glacier, or the houses of a distant town.

The view on the east, when he turned and faced in the direction from which he had come, was one of greater interest and of no less beauty. In the immediate foreground the city of Warwick, in which he had passed the previous night, thrust its smoking factory chimneys, its spires and towers, above the shining roofs and lofty elms. But the final element of charm was found in a broad and sinuous river, blue as the reflected sky, which flowed past the city's wharves, under a fine stone bridge, and on through woodland and ploughed land to the sea. Small wonder that he now forgot for a moment his own ambitions and plans, and thought only that St. George's Hall lifted its head within an earthly paradise!

The building, seen from the end, presented the same extraordinary change that is to be noted when a long ocean steamship which has been trailing across the horizon turns, shrinks, and comes bow on. In some such proportion to its length was the width of the Hall; but the tower, viewed from any angle, was still magnificent. With its four supporting turrets it appeared rather a group of towers than a single structure.

His immediate curiosity satisfied, the young man now exchanged the bright sunlight of the open for the comparative gloom of two long lines of maples, which flanked a narrow board walk from the street to the college. There was a prophecy of winter in the red and yellow leaves that dropped slowly downward one by one, or descended in rustling showers as a sudden gust of wind seized the thin branches and shook them against the sky.

And now, as if to personify the spirit of the place, he saw the figure of a young woman enter the walk from the other end, apparently from the college building. As they approached each other, he noted the fact that she was without hat or gloves, like a lady walking at ease through her own estate, and he guessed that she had some peculiar proprietary right in the premises. For one moment, in passing, he was startled to encounter a cool and observant gaze; then her eyes dropped to the collection of leaves which she held in her hands, as if she resumed an interrupted study of their harmonious shades.

He divined, after he had passed her by, that she had seen him from the moment they entered the opposite ends of the walk; and though he could not recall distinctly a feature of her face, he carried with him an impression of charm and colour singularly in unison with the season of the year. Moreover, her gaze, though momentary, was cumulative in its remembered effect, so that he presently turned and looked curiously after her retreating figure.

She had now emerged from the shadow of the trees into the sunlight of the open street beyond, where she stood looking westward, as if minded to continue her walk into the country. Even from that distance he could see how the unobstructed wind struggled with her slender figure, so that she leaned against it in resistance. As if persuaded by its force to change her plan, she turned slowly, released the leaves with a gesture of surrender, gathered her skirts in one hand, and with the other raised to her loosened hair she began to descend the hill.

The young man stood still until she had disappeared, smitten by an inexplicable sense of the fatality of that meeting. Verging upon the sixth lustrum of his age, he had passed through that vernal period when the face of every woman of more than ordinary charm suggested possibilities of the heart's adventure. With him the main business of life was no longer the seeking of a mate. All books, all arts, all accomplishments, had ceased to seem merely the accessories and the handmaidens of love. Yet never in those days of searching and romance had he been so attracted by a passing face. Beauty alone would have left him cold. The impression he received was far more rich, an impression to which the circumstances of the encounter gave a peculiar emphasis. The adventure seemed a possible keynote of the future, and there was an element of vague disquiet in his hope that he might meet her again, an element akin to fear.

CHAPTER II

THE TOWER

LLEWELLYN LEIGH found himself upon the wide stone flagging in front of the Hall before he awoke to a realisation of another meeting, now imminent, whose importance was far less conjectural than that upon which his fancy would fain have lingered.

The personality of the president of a large university might be a matter of indifference to a young instructor, inconspicuous among his many colleagues; but to be transferred to a full professorship in a small college was to come into close, daily contact with the ruling power, a contact from which there was no escape, in which instinctive likes and antipathies might make or mar a career. At this thought the young man began to speculate with some intensity upon the personality indicated thus far to his mind only by the name of Doctor Renshaw.

The very silence of the Hall, which impressed him now not so much by its beauty as by its solidity and height, invested the presiding genius of the place with something of sphinxlike mystery. The very faces of the gargoyles, impenetrable and calm, or grinningly grotesque, gave the fancy visible outward expression. One monster in particular, with twisted horns and impish tongue lolling forth between wide, inhuman teeth, seemed to look upon him with peculiar and malicious amusement. He experienced the spiritual depression which sometimes seems to emanate from inanimate things, that mood of self-distrust, that assurance of being unwelcome, which makes the coming to a strange city where one's fortunes are to be cast an act requiring courage. Seen close at hand, the college lost something of that inviting charm with which a distant view invested it. Though the length of the corporate life of the institution was not unimpressive from an American standpoint, the present building was comparatively recent. A thirty years' growth of ivy was scarcely able to atone for the unencrusted newness of the stones beneath. There was none of that narcotic suggestion of grey antiquity which in Oxford or Cambridge rebukes and stills a personal ambition.

Beyond each small doorway he saw a flight of stone stairs vanishing into the obscurity, and through the open windows he caught glimpses of decorations on the walls, the flags and signs and photographs which everywhere represent the artistic standards of the average undergraduate.

But a compensating surprise was presently in store. As he passed the tower, he heard the deep notes of a pipe organ; the open diapason and flutes of the great, the reeds of the swell, piled one upon another in a splendid harmony. He looked up and saw the lengthened windows that indicated the location of the chapel, which apparently extended the full height of the building. The musician within added a two-foot stop, the final needed element of brilliancy, crowning the edifice of sound his fingers had reared, so that now the music seemed to burst through the half-open windows and to shake the vines upon the wall. Lover of music as he was, this unexpected and triumphant symphony made a peculiar appeal to Leigh's imagination. Through it, as through a golden mist, he saw the drama of life sublimated, himself an actor of dignity and worth; and a few moments later he entered the president's office with a poise in which there remained no trace of anxious conjecture.

A figure rose to greet him as he entered, and though he was himself a tall man, the other loomed above him in the comparative twilight of the room, until he seemed to assume colossal proportions. Then Leigh realized that it was not the height of the man, but his bearing, that gave such significance to the inch or two between them. His grey hair alone suggested years; he held his shoulders like a man of forty. He removed his glasses deliberately, put them on the pile of papers beside him, and stood waiting. There was a courteous enquiry in his very attitude, although as yet he spoke no word. His head was tilted slightly backward, and his smile might have seemed almost inane in its width and in the impression of permanency which it conveyed, were it not for the intellectuality of the brow, the force of the fine aquiline nose, and the watchful perspicacity of the deepset eyes.

"This is Doctor Renshaw, I believe," said Leigh tentatively.

"Doctor Renshaw is here," returned the other, indicating by a slight gesture a figure seated at the far end of the table, which now arose and came toward them. "Doctor, I venture to assume that I have the pleasure of making you acquainted with Mr. Leigh, our new professor of mathematics."

His words were distinctly spoken, but pitched in so low a tone that they produced an odd effect, as of purring.

It was now that Leigh discovered his mistake. The man whom he had taken for the president was Bishop Wycliffe, and it required but five minutes of conversation to show him that the bishop, not the president, was the significant personality.

Doctor Renshaw might have been anywhere in the afternoon of life, and one felt instinctively that his sunset had antedated his meridian. He was like those ancients, spoken of with such disapproval by Cicero, who began to be old men early that they might continue to be old men for a long time. His value to the institution he had served so long, and his safety in his position, lay in the possession of negative qualities. His silence was interpreted as an indication of wisdom, and the firmly cut features of his inscrutable face would have served an artist as a personification of discipline. As he exchanged the conventional greetings the occasion demanded, he might even then have been standing for the portrait of himself that was one day to be added to those of his predecessors on the library wall; or he might have been one of the portraits already there that had stepped from its frame for a moment to take the newcomer by the hand.

In short, the thing of greatest significance in this meeting, the thing which made itself felt by all three participants, was the juxtaposition of the ancient and modern. The young man, clothed in a light grey suit, his soft hat crushed in the nervous grasp of his long fingers, a man whose scholastic training had been disassociated from religious traditions, now stood face to face with mediævalism, with two elderly men in dark habiliments, as greatly superior to himself in that subtlety which finds its highest expression in the ecclesiastical type as he was superior to them in the acquisition of scientific truth.

Presently the bishop invited his young friend, as he already called the new arrival, to walk with him about the grounds. Doctor Renshaw, left alone, resumed his seat in the heavy oaken chair which had once belonged to the founder of blessed memory, his shining head round as a ball against the diamonded panes at his back, the framed plans of the St. George's Hall of the future looking down upon him. On the broad stone mantel rested an antique episcopal mitre of black cloth, decorated with ecclesiastical symbols in tarnished thread, and a tall clock of almost equal age stood silent in the corner, showing on its pale, round face the carven signs of the zodiac. These objects seemed the peculiar property of the solitary tenant of the room, rather than relics of a former time, so still he sat, so convincing was the changelessness of his decorous age.

Meanwhile the bishop was giving Leigh new light upon his status in St. George's Hall.

"I must tell you, Mr. Leigh, — for it is better to be frank always, — that your appointment is in the nature of an experiment. Doctor Renshaw engaged your services for a year while I was absent in Europe. I knew nothing of it until my return, though I have every reason to believe, in view of your excellent recommendations and family connections, that the choice was felicitous."

Leigh listened to these words, so kindly but decisively spoken, with an emotion of uneasiness not untouched by resentment. How premature his thought of the presidency now appeared, how slight his claims to consideration! He learned now definitely that the bishop was the real president of the college, and that Doctor Renshaw was a fairly negligible element in the situation. He divined also the proud and self-sufficient spirit of the place, a pride entirely independent of worldly success, of numbers and noise.

"To be equally frank, bishop," he returned, "I thought I had passed my professional probation."

"We are all on probation, always," said the bishop, with a suggestion of amused indulgence in his smile. "I am far from questioning your professional capacity, but an arrangement for one year leaves us both free to make other plans, in case we find that the adjustment is not as perfect as we could have wished. However, that is a future contingency. *Quid sit futurum cras* — you know the sentiment. If you leave us, it will doubtless be at your own volition and, like the man in the parable, for the purpose of taking a higher place."

He laid his hand affectionately on his companion's shoulder. "Now here," he continued, "is the southern boundary of the quadrangle."

Having outlined the architectural possibilities of the future, he pointed with his stick to the large bronze statue of the founder that stood on the eastern verge of the plateau, opposite the tower.

"There is only one defect," he remarked, "in that otherwise fine work of art. You observe that the bishop's hand is extended in blessing toward the college, with the palm downward. Did you ever know a bishop to hold out his hand in such a position?"

His air was that of a man who has turned from business to friendly and familiar discourse with a sense of relief. They visited in turn two red brick buildings placed at some distance beyond and below the sacred square, devoted to scientific and athletic pursuits. Leigh wondered whether their position symbolised their relative unimportance to the magnificent hall upon the hill, and indicated a grudging concession to the dominant scientific spirit of the times.

The bishop viewed the chemical apparatus with frank condescension. "This is Blake's laboratory," he explained. "He amuses himself here with experiments in odours. If people will give money for such purposes, I suppose we must take it."

As they climbed slowly back to the plateau, he went lightly from one subject to another. His gospel of affability had finally crystallized, until it seemed to be contained in the formula of the small anecdote whose point, as often as not, turned upon the foibles of men of his own profession. The effect upon his listener was to put him at his ease, and to remove entirely the impression which the bishop's explanation of his position had made upon his mind.

"And now we will look at something that more nearly concerns you," said the bishop, as they approached the tower. "This large arch, by the way, is to figure in the completed plan as a *porte cochère.* It can be opened right through the tower, as you may observe, and the roadway will then extend from the boulevard behind the college, across the campus, through the eastern wing, and down the slope to the city beyond."

Standing on the steps beneath the shadowing archway, Leigh caught a reflected glow of enthusiasm from his guide's prophetic gaze. He was stirred by an appreciation of the dream so grandly conceived, so imperfectly realized, by a divination of the long struggle and the many disappointments.

"I hope we may live to see it, sir," he said.

"You may — you may," the bishop replied, with a touch of sadness in his tone. It was like a melancholy echo of Horace's *Postume, Postume.* "But come," he added, waking from his reverie with an effort. "I can scarcely expect you to take as much interest in this subject as I do, as yet, though in time you may begin to dream of it, too. Our goal at present lies farther up."

He led the way to the second story, where open doors disclosed glimpses of tenantless rooms.

"Professor Cardington lives here," he remarked, "and you may have the opposite suite, if you like. The rooms are secluded and command a fine view in either direction. These are the only apartments in the tower, and they are ordinarily reserved for the bachelors of the faculty."

Leigh would fain have turned in to examine the rooms he then and there decided to accept, but the bishop continued to climb upward, and he was obliged to put aside his curiosity for the time. The stone stairs had now come to an end, and were replaced by stairs of iron, protected by a railing, which followed the walls through successive floors and past slits of windows that framed distant views of the sunny landscape below. At last they came to a door, which the bishop unlocked. There was one more flight of stairs, narrower and darker than the others. Then they raised a trapdoor and stepped forth upon the roof of the tower.

For a few moments the intense light of the noonday sun was dazzling, and they stood basking gratefully in the warmth that presented a striking contrast with the chill shadows from which they had emerged. Leigh observed that he stood upon a platform some fifty feet square, surrounded by a parapet that extended at least a foot above his head. This wall, however, did not shut out the prospect entirely, for the regular depressions of its castellated edge formed a series of embrasures through which it was possible for a man of average height to look out over the surrounding country. The tiled floor sloped slightly toward each corner, where apertures could be seen leading into four long stone troughs that spouted water in rainy weather. The enclosure collected and held both the light and the heat of the sun, and the bishop remarked that for some time after dark the tiles remained warm to the touch.

In the centre of this space stood a wooden building, or shed, twenty-five feet square, painted a dark red, its roof on a level with the height of the outer parapet. The bishop opened the door with another key and threw the windows wide, disclosing a canvas-hooded telescope in the centre, chairs and tables bearing astronomical instruments, and sidereal maps upon the walls. Then, as he pressed a lever, the roof was cleft asunder till the sky expanded overhead.

"Ah," he said, pleased with Leigh's exclamation of interest. "I thought this was more in your line. This equatorial telescope and sliding roof are the gift of a former alumnus, left us by a provision in his will. I had hoped he would contribute something toward the chapel." His sigh, his abstracted look, showed how much more acceptable such a gift would have been. "Our present chapel in the main building is more fitted for an assembly hall or commons. Please God, we shall one day worship Him in a separate edifice more worthy of the purpose." He depressed the eye end of the telescope until the muzzle pointed upward above the parapet toward the sky. "The shed," he went on, "cannot be seen from below. I refused to allow an incongruous dome to be built here, but the sliding flat roof answers the purpose as well. You may find a senior who wishes to take astronomy, but I fear that most of your effort must be expended in drilling elementary mathematics into recalcitrant freshmen and sophomores. Your predecessor was a good mathematician as far as he went, but he did n't go as far as the stars. He tried it once, and fell, like Icarus, into the sea. In other words, he published something based upon insufficient data, I believe, which reflected no credit on the college. Then he naturally blamed the instrument."

"I have done something in astronomy," Leigh remarked, "and hope to do more."

"Well, I must leave you now," said his conductor. "You must come and dine with us soon. I would like you to meet my daughter. Say a week from to-night, at seven. I 'll leave you here, if you wish, to examine the telescope further. Doctor Renshaw will give you all necessary information in regard to your rooms, the entrance examinations, *et cetera*."

He had almost disappeared down the stairs as he said these words. Presently his head and shoulders arose once more above the roof.

"And here are the keys," he added. "What did you say your given name was?"

"Llewellyn," Leigh answered, surprised at the abruptness of the question.

"Ah," said the bishop, chuckling softly, "so it is. A good Welsh name, but Peter would be more appropriate under the circumstances."

With this little jest, whose significance Leigh was somewhat slow in grasping, he once more descended the stairs.

It was now high noon, and Leigh, left alone, paced up and down the large, sunny square, filled with appreciative thoughts of the bishop. So benign and humorous was the presence of the man that for some time his influence survived his actual departure and precluded other thoughts. In a reactionary glow of hope and confidence the young astronomer traversed the circumference of his lofty eyrie, pausing from time to time to gaze through one of the embrasures of the parapet upon the incomparable scene below. Accustomed as he was to the arid glory of California, he found a grateful refreshment in this far greener country. The tower was like a Pisgah, from which he gazed upon the promised land with eyes that wearied of the desert.

CHAPTER III

CARDINGTON

LEIGH stood before the mirror in his bedroom and wrestled with his tie in preparation for the bishop's dinner. The week had brought in due course that procession of events which makes the opening of a college term a period of exceptional activity, but for the first time he had passed through the trial untaxed. He was slowly recovering from a sense of disappointment similar to that felt by a metropolitan at some Arcadian retreat, when he stands on the lonely platform at nightfall, listening to the trilling of the frogs increasing as the rumble of the train diminishes in the distance, and experiences a wild impulse to return at once to the fulness of life from which he has fled.

In the ample leisure afforded by his new position Leigh discovered an analogous consciousness of loss, with its consequent dismay. He had known many solitary hours when, as a student in the Lick Observatory, he had searched the skies for long months together; but the experience was overlaid by one more recent, so that now, with the varied life of a great university still ringing in his ears, he looked about and asked himself disconsolately if this were all. Had he plumbed the possibilities of the place in so short a time? And, if so, what was left for him in the year to come?

An answer to this question was suggested by his present occupation. If he could now and again leave the rarefied atmosphere of the hill for some such diversion as the one in prospect, he would return better able to make good use of that solitude in which real achievement is shaped.

As yet there seemed small chance that such diversions would become sufficiently numerous to interfere with his work. He had met the other nine members of the faculty, and while he found them courteous, he became at once aware that their attitude toward him as a newcomer was one of indifference. The smallness of their number did not operate to draw them more closely together, as might have been supposed. Each returned to the city at the end of his day's work, and was lost to view in his own peculiar circle. Some time, no doubt, their social obligation to the new professor in the tower would become imperative, but the time was not yet. Meanwhile, he felt himself regarded warily, an attitude which to his friendly Western nature seemed to betoken a vague disapprobation. He did not realise that there was nothing personal in this aloofness, except in so far as he personified a larger life, whose hopeful outlook stirred in more cabined natures an unacknowledged resentment. Here he found no remnant of the traditional hospitality of the borderland. The conditions of this old community of specialised interests were the opposite of those he had encountered in the West, where a stranger was welcomed on the slim credentials of his appearance.

Leigh had been told that the road to promotion led through the small college, and he had taken that road hopefully; but now he felt like one who had drifted into an eddy below the bank, while the great stream of the national educational tendency went tossing and foaming past.

These unaccustomed circumstances gave an unwonted significance to the simple occupation in which he was employed, and focussed his mind expectantly upon the event which, in the fuller life he had left, would have been accepted as a matter of course.

His preparations completed, he donned his overcoat and hat, and stood looking from his window over the valley toward the west. The sun was setting in an angry splendour that threatened storms. Even as he looked, the wind attained increased velocity and began to whine and whistle about the solid masonry of the tower. Leigh drew in the heavy, leaded panes against the possible beating of the rain. He passed his fingers lightly down the cold stone casement, thinking of its immense thickness and of the beauty of its careful cutting. Never had he lived in such rooms. His was an habitat fit for a prince of the Middle Ages, and some glimpse of the fascination which this secluded life might come to possess was given him at that moment. Evidently, Professor Cardington, his neighbour across the hall, had felt it and succumbed; else how could a man of his extraordinary talent have remained so long buried, as it were, from the world?

Revolving this mystery in his mind, he passed into his sitting-room on the eastern side of the building. It was pleasant to think that Cardington was to accompany him to the bishop's, but as it was still too soon to call for him, he stood for a few moments looking down upon the campus. The giant shadow of the Hall had now crept to the verge of the plateau. There was no human figure on its bleak expanse, but the small trees which found scant nourishment in the rock beneath swayed gently in the broken wind, like a line of sentries marking time. In the centre of the line the flagpole sprang up, thin and white, lifting the stars and stripes into the lurid light above the shadow. He could hear the whipping of the halyards against the pole; but suddenly the sound ceased, the flag began to flutter downward till its colours were quenched, and only the gilded ball above now caught the sun's last rays. Straining his gaze, he saw the janitor fold up the flag on the grass and carry it within. Then darkness seemed to fall like a canopy, beneath which the lights of the city trembled into view.

A moment later he stood in Cardington's doorway, and looked with relief upon the sight presented to his eyes. The flickering fire in the grate, the bewildering congeries of books, statues, and furniture, were doubly homelike by contrast with Leigh's late vision of the descending night without. The old caretaker of the tower was wont to say that she never knew a neater man than Professor Cardington, or a more disorderly room than his. The accumulation of articles in the room seemed to symbolise the owner's mental furniture, while his personal neatness was a habit acquired during his stay at West Point, where he had once occupied the chair of a modern language. There was a suggestion of the soldier also in his unbending back as he sat at his desk, so absorbed in his work that he did not at first look up to see who had answered his invitation to enter.

The face he turned upon his visitor presently was stern and grey in effect, like that of a man who has seen service. His blue eyes, though pale in tone, were brilliant, as if the intellect behind them burned with steady intensity and force. Nature had concealed his true quality behind a baffling mask, for there was not a line in his face to hint of his sensitive spirit, or of the humorous moods that swept over him in unexpected gusts. Now his aspect brightened, as from a warmth within.

"Come in, Mr. Leigh," he cried cheerily. "Come in. I thought it was some student who wished to ask me what use there was in studying Latin. I am just outlining an article on the Roman Forum for the new encyclopædia. You might like to see Boni's latest contribution, and the photographs I took myself last summer."

He reached for his meerschaum pipe, and paused to gaze with a smoker's admiration at the red-brown perfection of the polished bowl.

"But you have n't forgotten the dinner?" Leigh asked, perceiving that the other was preparing to settle back in his chair for one of those discursive talks in which his guests delighted.

"The dinner! I had quite forgotten it." And he put down the pipe with evident reluctance. "Such is the power of preoccupation."

"We're a tall set of men here," Leigh said, as the professor rose to his feet. "You and the bishop and I would measure eighteen feet or more, placed one above the other."

"Pelion on Ossa!" Cardington cried. "How much more impressive it makes us seem than if you had merely stated that each of us was six feet tall! It takes an astronomer to calculate great distances. I quite compassionate those little fellows, our colleagues." His eyes twinkled behind his rimless spectacles. "Just amuse yourself with these photographs awhile. Not in your line, perhaps, but interesting to us glow-worms that flit about in ruinous places. I 'll be with you in a few moments."

Even from the room beyond he continued the conversation in his own odd manner, passing to antipodal subjects by paths of association beyond the guess of an imagination less vagrant than his own. With Cardington conversation was a fine art. He loved the adequate or picturesque word as a miner loves an ingot of gold, yet he was able to display his linguistic stores without incurring the charge of pedantry, much as certain women can carry without offence clothes that would smother a more insignificant personality.

"We still have a few minutes to spare," he announced, when he presently reappeared. "Now, which will you have, a Roman Catholic, or an Episcopalian, or a Presbyterian beverage,—Benedictine, port wine, or whiskey?"

Leigh's mood expanded in response to the hospitality. Here was a little fling of the spirit of which he stood in need, a promise of comradeship that was all the more welcome from the fact that his other colleagues had kept him waiting in the vestibule of their regard.

"I 'll drink your health in a little whiskey," he replied with alacrity.

"Quite right," Cardington commented, producing a bottle of Scotch. "I hope you 'll find that this has the true Calvinistic flavour. And here 's to you likewise. May you yet discover the length, the depth, and the uses of all the canals of Mars." Over the rim of his glass his eyes began to brighten in a manner which his guest already knew to be a prophecy of something good. "That was an excellent jest of the bishop's you told me of yesterday, calling you Peter when he handed you the keys of the door that leads to heaven. Now what did you say in reply?"

"Nothing," Leigh confessed. "He did n't give me fair warning of what was coming."

"Then you lost the opportunity of your life. If you had only said, 'Thank you, my Lord!' Even a Yankee bishop would have had no objection to being my-lorded, you know. Ah, that would have been the retort courteous, and the story is incomplete without it. By your kind permission I shall tell it with that addendum."

"A footnote by Professor Cardington," Leigh suggested.

"No, no, not at all. I 'll work it into the text as your own. The story must go down in history along with the classic jest in regard to the position of the statue's outstretched palm. The bishop told you that, no doubt, anticipating my own good offices."

"It may interest you to know," he went on, as they began to descend the stairs, "that you are to meet a very charming young lady to-night. Miss Wycliffe is a very remarkable young woman in some respects. Have you yet had the pleasure of making her acquaintance?"

"What is she like?" Leigh asked, wondering whether the answer would suggest in any way the young woman he had met the morning of his arrival.

"I shall not allow my enthusiasm to betray me into an inadequate description," Cardington declared. "I could no more make the subject clear to you than you could explain to me the *n*th degree of $x+z$, if there is any such expression in algebra, which I should n't be surprised to discover is the case."

"Then I shall have to possess my soul in patience," Leigh answered, with apparent indifference.

When they emerged from the shadow of the Hall, and plunged between the lines of maples, they were obliged to go in single file, for the narrowness of the way. The young mathematician glanced at the last melancholy glow of the sunset which spread out in a faint, fan-shaped aurora above a dun rampart of clouds. His love of nature was no less keen than his appreciation of people and events. The mathematician and the poet held alternate sway over him. This di-psychic quality was evidenced by the rapidity with which the expression of his eye would frequently change from cold calculation to a certain rapt observation, as if he looked up from a complicated problem to contemplate a glimpse of blue distance. Thus it was that he appreciated to the full the panorama spread out before him, though his mind was intent upon another subject; or rather, it might be said that the sight gave warmth and colouring to his thought. He had passed the place of that first meeting several times during the week, and never without a vivid remembrance of it. If the young woman who had made such an impression upon him were the bishop's daughter, why had he not seen her in the interim, at the initial service in the chapel when visitors were present, upon the grounds, or in the streets of the city? Perhaps she had been away, and had just returned. At all events, he should know before long.

Of one thing he felt assured. If Miss Wycliffe turned out to be some one else, she would hold no interest for him, not even if she possessed all the indescribable qualities of which Cardington had hinted. Speculating upon this possibility, he scarcely listened now to the words of his companion swinging on ahead, as they came brokenly to his ears in the gusts of wind.

CHAPTER IV

THE BISHOP'S DAUGHTER

THE bishop's house was situated about half a mile from the college on Birdseye Avenue, the principal residence street of Warwick. A forest aisle and city thoroughfare combined, this vista of ancient elms suggested the inspiration of those Gothic cathedrals of the Old World from whose associations and influence the Puritans had fled away. During their transit beneath this splendid nave, Cardington entertained his companion with an account of the house they were to visit, its history and architectural pretensions. In sharp distinction to the prevalent style of building, the episcopal residence suggested a Tudor palace. Its pointed windows, its dentilated battlements, its miniature turrets, would have been impressive on a larger scale, in stone, but being of wood, in a reduced proportion, they appeared an inadequate plagiarism, which not even the extensive grounds could shield from criticism. Seen at night-time, however, the counterfeit was far less glaring. The form, rather than the material, attracted the eye; the ecclesiastical windows glimmering among the trees, the antique lantern in the vestibule, which concealed behind its powdered glass a modern electric bulb, the turrets, dimly discerned by the light from the avenue, combined to make an appeal to the historical imagination.

To Leigh, seeing the house thus for the first time, it appeared a peculiarly appropriate habitat for Bishop Wycliffe; for he was one that carried the stamp of his profession in his very bearing, and in every lineament of his face. It was more difficult to imagine a young and charming woman housed in such a place, but his first glimpse of the bishop's daughter showed him that her Pagan beauty was emphasized rather than lessened by contrast with her surroundings.

She was sitting in the drawing-room to the left of the entrance hall, bending over a book. If she heard the entrance of her visitors into the hall, she made no sign, but kept her eyes bent upon her novel, the left-hand side of which, supported on her knee, had grown to the thickness of half an inch. Only a few pages remained unread, half lifted on the other side, above which her ivory paper knife hung suspended. Clothed in a yellow gown and sitting in a flood of yellow light that radiated from the shaded lamp beside her, she presented an extraordinarily vivid picture against the brown panelling of the wall. Even in repose one divined the suppressed energy of the figure, a quality indicated by the almost imperceptible movement of the small slipper that peeped beyond the border of her gown, and by the gentle heaving of the lace at her throat. Yet there was something in the graceful abandon of her attitude reminiscent of the women of the South.

So struck was Leigh by this picture, and by the fact that his hope of meeting again the goddess of the maple walk was about to be realized, that Cardington was well on his way up the stairs before he hurried in pursuit. Unawake himself to modern art tendencies, he felt, without conscious reflection or comparison, the old-fashioned appearance of the house. The severe, dark paper on the wall, the steel engravings that had hung for years untouched, were evidently as the bishop's wife, or as one belonging to a still earlier generation, had placed them. They proclaimed a reverence for old associations, or the indifference of an unmarried daughter to the artistic possibilities of a house that was not of her own choosing.

The room into which they entered appeared to be the bishop's own, or a guest chamber. At least, there was no suggestion of the feminine in the furniture, or in the ecclesiastical pictures that adorned the walls. Even the military brushes on the bureau possessed an episcopal dignity of size and weight, and the two tall candles in their massive silver candlesticks glimmered like altar lights.

"There's plenty of atmosphere in this place," Leigh remarked, as he stood before the mirror and applied the brushes to his hair, which, because of its thickness, was invariably disordered by the lifting of his hat. "I mean atmosphere in the modern fictional sense. It seems to me I saw a duplicate of that four-posted monstrosity of a bed at the Exposition this summer."

"I love to come in contact with the fresh, unprejudiced view of the West," Cardington returned. "I've no doubt you are calculating the number of microbes that ancient piece of furniture could accommodate, and thinking that a brass bedstead would be much more sanitary."

"You do me injustice," Leigh retorted good-humouredly. "Even scientists have their unprofessional moments. I was just reminded of a story I once read of a bed of that kind with a movable canopy that came down in the night and smothered the occupant."

"Excellent," said Cardington. "The thing was worked, as I remember, from the room above, and was used by the robber host to persuade his guests to part peaceably with their valuables. But I fear that you are going to show an irreverent attitude of mind toward the local divinities."

"And what may they be?"

"Two in particular, an alliterative couple, Family and Furniture."

"Why not add Folly to the number?" Leigh suggested.

"An instinct of self-preservation should prevent such an addition. That might be as injudicious as it would have been for some bright young man in ancient Egypt, five thousand years before the Christian era, to express a doubt concerning the divinity of the sacred bull. The correctness of his conjecture would not have saved him from a horrible death at the hands of the faithful." And he began to lead the way downstairs.

As they entered the drawing-room, Miss Wycliffe closed her book with satisfied emphasis and rose to meet them. The bishop was there also, standing in the background and waiting his turn. His eyes were on his daughter rather than on his guests, with a pride that was evident at even a casual glance. Again Leigh encountered that look which had so deeply attracted him. Her eyes were very dark, and almost misty in their warm light, as if she were somewhat dazed by long perusal of the printed page. She possessed also that mark of feminine beauty so prized by the ancients, a low forehead, and there was a suggestion of the classic in the arrangement of her hair. He found her smile peculiarly winning, and was conscious of the responsiveness of her fingers, so different from the limp passivity of many a feminine greeting. Though not more given to self-importance than the average young man, he was somehow aware that she too remembered their first casual encounter. Her failure to mention it now served only to invest it with the greater significance.

"Miss Felicity," Cardington began, when they had become seated, "I suspect that you were racing against time, endeavouring, in fact, to finish that book before our arrival should interrupt you."

"You would not have been welcome a moment sooner," she admitted.

"Felicity is a deep student in shallow literature," the bishop put in epigrammatically.

"As if Zola were ever shallow," she said. "I'll leave it with Mr. Leigh."

"You can search me for an opinion," he replied; and in the breezy colloquialism of the expression, no less than in a certain vividness of manner, his isolation from the others became apparent. "My French reading is mostly confined to astronomical monographs."

"Miss Felicity," Cardington interposed, with an elaborate and old-fashioned gallantry that became him, "Mr. Leigh is a student of stars, and therefore he is more concerned with the reader than with the book. If you will persist in shining upon him so dazzlingly, you cannot be surprised if he turns an unseeing eye upon any object you may present for his inspection. Now, since I have basked longer in your light, I may perhaps—allow me." He reached for the book and began to turn over the leaves.

She watched his growing absorption with indulgent amusement, and the comradeship of the two omnivorous readers was evident. Cardington was frankly reading, oblivious of his hosts, a liberty which indicated his familiar standing in that house.

"I have a weakness for polymathists of the old school," the bishop remarked, harking back to his guest's confession of narrower interests, "of which class I may say that Professor Cardington is almost the only example within my range of observation. I have noticed that Latin is becoming as strange to the average graduate as Eliot's Indian Bible."

"But Latin does n't help the modern world to build railroads, or battleships, or motor cars," Leigh suggested, by way of presenting the opposite view.

"Always the argument of utility," the bishop returned, with mournful resignation. "But how have modern inventions added to the beauty or the dignity of human life? Man is mastered and slain by his own inventions, and a skyscraper reduces him to the proportions of an ant."

"I am tempted to mention cathedrals as having rather a dwarfing effect upon their builders," Leigh said.

"I should hope so! Better to be dwarfed by the magnificence of a temple of the Lord than by the hideous hugeness of a temple of trade." The bishop's dry smile indicated that he had scored.

His antagonist laughed outright, with a keen appreciation of the fact that his comparison had given the bishop the very opportunity he desired. It seemed that circumstances rather than conviction had forced him into his present championship of the useful. Miss Wycliffe's appeal had brought out the confession of a special interest, which had stamped him unduly. In addition, the section of the country from which he came was against him. The bishop was not without his prejudices, and was disposed to father all the materialistic spirit of the age upon his guest, whether or no. He had noted that lapse into slang, and his attitude had become like that of the loiterers in the hall of Caiaphas, the high priest. Had his thought become vocal, it would have run like a garbled version of their triumphant charge against St. Peter: "Thou art a Westerner, and thy speech bewrayeth thee."

His daughter had been a mere observer of the little tilt she had unwittingly precipitated, and now, as she saw the younger champion go down so gaily, she was moved by his spirit to sympathetic participation.

"It seems to me, father," she interposed, "that you and Mr. Leigh are like the two knights who came to blows over the colour of a shield that was white on one side and black on the other."

"You are quite right, my dear," he replied gracefully, "and as I see that dinner is served, I will take this opportunity to dismount from my hobby for a little refreshment."

"You must let me take this book with me when I go," Cardington begged, rising from its perusal with evident reluctance.

"It must lie on Mrs. Parr's table for a month first," she replied. "I promised to let her pretend to read it."

"I call that a wicked speech," he reproved. "Where is that charity which your father has striven to inculcate in your heart?"

She slipped the book into a large Satsuma vase, with a sidelong glance at Leigh. Cardington accepted the act with a meek acquiescence that rested comically upon him and proclaimed his chains.

Had Leigh been asked subsequently to give a description of the dishes of which he partook that evening, he would have made a sorry showing, for he was conscious only of his hostess, and intoxicated by a divination of her consciousness of him. Cardington and the bishop were the chief talkers, and as the conversation presently turned to purely local affairs, of which Leigh had as yet scant knowledge, he was rather pleased than otherwise to become a listener and observer. In this divided attitude of mind his observation was chiefly engaged. He noted particularly the string of gold beads which Miss Wycliffe wore, and their reflection against her throat reminded him of a children's game, which consisted in holding a buttercup beneath the chin of a companion.

Distracted by the furtive contemplation of such minutiæ, he gradually became aware of the fact that the talk between Cardington and the bishop had lost the tone of suavity that characterized its beginning.

"No other engagement shall interfere with my voting on that day," the bishop declared, with grim emphasis. "We must dispose of this fellow's pretensions once for all. It is preposterous that a professional baseball player and street-car conductor should aspire to become mayor of Warwick. An orator? Nonsense! Just a paltry gift of the gab. Balaam's is n't the only ass whose mouth the Lord in his inscrutable wisdom has seen fit to open."

Leigh suddenly awoke to the fact that a situation had developed during his absorption, and that both men were looking at Miss Wycliffe, the bishop defiantly, Cardington with an odd expression of concern. That she was affected by her father's announcement and manner was evidenced in the gleam of cold resentment with which she met his look, but in a moment the light was gone, leaving her eyes as mysterious as a deep pool in the woods at twilight.

"Now, bishop," Cardington protested, "I was merely trying to express the fact that there is a certain facility in this young Emmet's utterances which belongs to his nation. Perhaps we ought to appreciate our opportunity to watch here in Warwick the development of a second Edmund Burke."

It was Miss Wycliffe herself who gave Leigh the clue, and so apparently spontaneous was her amusement as she turned to him that he began to doubt his first impression of a far different emotion.

"This house is divided against itself," she explained, "into two political camps. I must try to convert you to my Democratic point of view, for just at present I am outnumbered two to one."

"Not two to one," Cardington objected. "Say rather that the forces are drawn up in the proportion of one and a half to one and a half. I stand in the ambiguous position of the peacemaker, inclining now this way, now that, and receiving in turn the whacks of each contestant. I have been compelled to accept on faith the reward that Scripture promises to such as myself, for it has not yet materialized to any appreciable extent."

"There 's more truth than poetry in that," she answered, laughing. "Poor Mr. Cardington's olive branch has proved a boomerang to himself, I fear."

It pleased the bishop to be blandly diverted by these sallies, though it was evident that his mind had set so strongly in one direction as to require an effort on his part to turn it aside. However, he was not one to exhibit a family difference before a stranger, when once recalled to his senses, and the topic that had elicited these few scintillations of feeling was dropped by common consent.

Presently Miss Wycliffe drew Leigh on to talk of astronomy, of the Lick Observatory, of California, its climate, its products, and its people, subjects upon which he alone of the company possessed knowledge at first hand. He was impressed by his auditors' ignorance of all that country which lies west of the Mississippi, and a realisation of the bishop's sceptical attitude aroused him to partisan enthusiasm. Their conception of the West was as inadequate as the average Englishman's conception of America. Some few people they had known who had gone out to California for their health, and in a general way they appreciated the fact that the fruits and flowers of the coast were of peculiar size and beauty; but, after all, the place seemed to them more a colony of the United States than an integral part of the country, a place of such decidedly inferior interest to Europe that any time in the dim future would do for its inspection.

"Miss Wycliffe," he ended, "your interest has betrayed me into making a bore of myself."

"On the contrary," she returned, "I shall take the very first opportunity of going out to California. I shall be ashamed to go to Switzerland again without the Sierras as a background of comparison. And in the mean time I intend to begin the study of astronomy. I thought it would be jolly to bring up a party some evening to look through the telescope."

"By all means!" he cried.

"I have yet to see the day," said Cardington, "when Miss Felicity will do me the honour of begging the loan of a Latin grammar."

"I call that ungrateful," she returned. "Did n't I tramp all over the Roman Forum with you one boiling afternoon, while you explained that we had n't strayed into a stone quarry, as I had supposed?"

"So you did," he admitted. "That was a pleasant little archæological *giro*, and you showed yourself upon that occasion to be an audience of great endurance."

This was only one indication Leigh had received of mutual experiences and interests between the two, yet, bewitched though he was, the discovery aroused no uneasiness within him. It was not only that he mentally exaggerated his colleague's age. His source of comfort was deeper, and lay in Miss Wycliffe's attitude of comradeship toward her old friend. It seemed that such an attitude must preclude romance, at least on her part. No man situated as he was could have avoided the speculation that now absorbed him in regard to the possible rivalry of another. In the end he decided that Cardington's gaze, when it lingered upon his hostess, betrayed reminiscence rather than hope.

It chanced that the dinner was followed by a wedding, one of those forlorn ceremonies sometimes performed in the houses of the clergy between those who seem to have no kin or friends or home of their own. The bishop summoned his guests as witnesses, and as Leigh took the seat which Miss Wycliffe made for him beside her, he was struck by the impression which this not unusual incident appeared to make upon her mind. She sat with her chin resting upon the palm of her hand, in absorbed, almost pained, contemplation, as if the actual scene were merely the starting-point of a long journey of the imagination.

In fact, there was nothing intrinsically interesting in the couple before them. They possessed not even the picturesqueness of speech and costume which belongs to the plebeian orders of older civilizations. These were the people that seemed to justify Schopenhauer's cynical contention concerning the economy of Nature, who invests youth with just enough transient beauty to ensure the perpetuation of the race, making men and women serve her purpose under the delusion that they are free agents and ministers to their own pleasure. Here were no pomp and circumstance to interpose their false colours before the sordid vista of the future. It lay glaringly before the imagination of the onlookers; and to avoid depths of spiritual depression, they had need to remind themselves of the happy blindness of those that moved their pity.

Leigh might perhaps have indulged in far other thoughts had the wedding been of a different character, or had he perceived any suggestion of a romantic mood in the woman at his side. Quick to feel an atmosphere, he found that he had caught from her a sombre view. How deeply she thought or felt he could only guess, but hers was a personality that suggested depth, and the far sadness of her gaze shut the door between them which he had supposed about to open wider. The bishop turned unexpectedly.

"The groom has forgotten the ring," he said to his daughter. "Will you lend him yours?"

She glanced quickly at her hands, and a delicate colour crept into her face.

"I must have left it in my room," she answered. She made no motion to go for it, and, turning from her with a hint of impatience, he drew his seal ring from his finger.

The incident, slight as it was, assumed unusual significance in the minds of the spectators, and gave the ceremony a tone akin to comedy. Perhaps they enjoyed the bishop's impatience, the sight of the episcopal ring upon the girl's finger; or it may be that these things reminded them of the portentous solemnity into which they had sunk. Miss Wycliffe especially seemed to welcome the diversion, and showed an ebullient vivacity when she offered her congratulations, which Leigh had not previously observed in her.

It was the bishop, however, and not his daughter, who saved the situation for the embarrassed couple he had just made man and wife. It was he who ordered wine and cake, and drank their happiness with a genuine humanity that took no reckoning of class in life's common experiences. This was the quality that had won him love when, as a clergyman, the homelier duties of his profession had claimed more of his time. Even those not of his own communion often came to him for such services as the present, with a feeling that he gave dignity and reality to the ceremony. Observing the luminous kindliness of his smile, one might well infer that he was reminded of the marriage at Cana of Galilee, and that he desired to make this incident as bright a spot as possible in two lives which would doubtless know more of burden-bearing than of joy. Nor was he content with this attention alone. Chancing to remember the carnations that had stood on the table at dinner, he brought them with his own hands, wiping the long stems with his handkerchief before presenting them to the bride.

When they were gone, his glance fell upon an envelope which the groom had left unnoticed on the piano.

"Look at this," he said, drawing forth a two-dollar bill. "Why did n't I see him do that in time? At least, I am grateful that he did n't attempt to pay me at parting, while in the act of shaking hands." His eyes twinkled deeply. "You have no idea what a shock it is to feel a crisp bill crinkling in your palm at such a moment. But come, gentlemen. Our post-prandial smoke has been too long postponed."

"Why not leave Mr. Leigh to smoke his cigarette with me?" Miss Wycliffe suggested. "We have n't yet had a chance to become acquainted."

This proposition, which filled the young man with surprise and exhilaration, seemed nothing unusual to the other two, and they went off without remark, perhaps not unwilling to have an opportunity to chat alone.

Miss Wycliffe took the chair in which Leigh had seen her at his entering. She held no fancy work in her hands, but toyed gracefully with the ivory cimeter which had separated the leaves of her novel. He was reminded of the episode of the ring by observing that she wore no jewelry except the string of gold beads, and wondered whether she had a philosophical contempt for such adornment. If it were a matter of taste, as indeed it must be, her instinct, he felt, was singularly correct, for such adventitious aids could add nothing to her beauty. They were rather the final dependence of wrinkled dowagers. As he watched her through the smoke of his cigarette, chatting still of the wedding, he was aware that she appeared conscious of the voices whose intonations rose and fell beyond the study door. Presently the sound was varied by a hearty laugh.

"I 've no doubt they have gone back to politics," she remarked. Her words recalled the conversation at the table, which he had by this time forgotten.

"This is a good opportunity to carry out your promise to convert me to your point of view," he answered, "and I am quite prepared to be converted. Being a Mugwump, the mere name of a party holds no superstitious sway over my imagination. Still, my support, like your own, must be purely sentimental, for I have no vote in Warwick. I have heard just enough to arouse my curiosity and interest. Who is this Mr. Burke?"

"Emmet," she corrected. "Mr. Cardington would have his jest in comparing him with Burke. You noticed, perhaps, that they were more or less baiting me?"

"I suspected something like it."

"Mr. Emmet is a *protégé* of mine," she explained frankly, "who is trying to break the power of the Republican ring that has ruled Warwick since the war."

"I see," he nodded. "One of those struggles against municipal corruption that are such a hopeful sign of the times. It seems strange that in the management of our cities alone our form of government has been a failure. But we have lighted upon a hobby of mine, and I must n't begin to ride it."

"Then you will be interested in the situation," she returned.

It was presently evident that her own interest was not that of a student of the science of government, though he was impressed by her knowledge of local political conditions. The situation was indeed typical: entrenched power on the one hand, and on the other a desire to "turn the rascals out." The singularity lay in the fact that Miss Wycliffe, in spite of the prejudice and influence of her father, was siding against her own class. Leigh listened with growing interest and wonder to her charges of snobbishness and corruption against the Republican clique.

"You certainly love fair play," he remarked admiringly. "Such an impersonal attitude is wont to be claimed by men as their own peculiar possession."

Her smile disclaimed exceptional credit.

"I 'm not a bit impersonal, I assure you. I can't abide Judge Swigart, or his political lieutenant, Anthony Cobbens, a turkey gobbler and a wretched little weasel, even though we are the best of friends."

"I see," he said, greatly diverted by her admission. Her eyes fell beneath his too discriminating gaze, but she raised them again with the impersonal calmness of an experienced woman.

"Besides, as I said before, Mr. Emmet is a *protégé* of mine. I have even loaned him books, and am quite bent upon seeing his education result in making him mayor."

"Good work!" he cried. "I should like to lend a hand myself."

"Why don't you?" she asked.

"How can I?" he retorted. "Shall I go out and stump the town?"

"I'll tell you," she said, bending forward and fixing him with a look of discovery. "What Mr. Emmet needs more than anything else is a friend out of his own class, some one like yourself, who could correct his perspective a little. How shall I explain it? He seems in danger of becoming a demagogue, and of resting his case on an appeal to class-hatred."

Leigh had not supposed that his semi-jocular wish would be taken so literally, but he soon discovered that she gave it its face value. She went on with growing earnestness.

"There is to be a joint debate between him and Judge Swigart in about a fortnight, and I'm afraid that Mr. Emmet will injure his cause by overstatement, by that very bitterness I mentioned. If he could confine himself to the facts, he might win the support of many who are ready to follow a safe leader, but would be antagonized by a hint of socialism."

"Do you mean that I could accomplish all this in such a short time?" he asked. "To be perfectly frank, the prospect of the task dismays me. He'd be sure to resent the attempt."

"Not he," she answered with conviction. "He 'd be grateful for such support as yours. He 's really an awfully nice fellow, and I think you 'd find him rather interesting."

"I don't doubt it for a minute," he assured her. "But how am I to make his acquaintance in the first place?"

She considered the question awhile. "Just tell him I thought you would like to know each other. That would make it perfectly easy and natural."

Leigh could not fail to see that this method was the best, if the thing were to be done at all. She could not bring them together socially, and a note of introduction would be too formal. Doubtless the man looked up to her as his patroness, and would accept anything from her with something of feudal loyalty.

"I might meet him casually, — on purpose, — and if we happened to like each other and began to talk about politics" — The sentence dwindled into a dubious smile.

"Do," she urged. "I really think you could influence him for good."

Leigh was less sure of it, and the other two men returned before he had committed himself to a plan that seemed, even when seen under her influence, to be little short of quixotic.

During the walk home he tried Cardington on the subject of Emmet, but found him uncommunicative, almost brusque, in his reticence. Leigh suspected that the subject might be a sore one with him, and that he thoroughly disapproved of Miss Wycliffe's odd charity. When a talker is silent, his silence has the tactile quality of Egyptian darkness, and so it now appeared in Cardington. Concerning Miss Wycliffe herself they made no comment, doubtless because they were thinking of her so intently. Leigh reviewed every moment he had passed in her company, recalling each look and word. He was impressed now, more than he had been at the time, with the intensity of her interest in the election, and it occurred to him that to do as she desired, or at least to attempt it, would establish a claim upon her regard. This was his opportunity. If he desired to win her favour, he must regard her wish as mandatory. How much he desired to win it he did not try to conceal from himself.

His frankness extended even farther. When he recalled that it was the bishop and not his daughter who had shown humanity at the wedding, he was impressed by her curious insensibility. It seemed to him peculiarly feminine to take an interest in such a scene, and most of the women he knew would have looked on with tremulous sympathy. Was this mere instinctive selfishness on her part? If he vaguely condemned her attitude in this matter, he appreciated her father's conduct the more by contrast. Somehow he guessed that the bishop did not altogether like him, but he felt that no matter what the future might bring forth in their relationship, he could never forget that charming episode. The bishop was a true aristocrat, he reflected, more inclined to be haughty to his equals than to his inferiors. Doubtless Emmet, had he been content with that station of life in which it had pleased God to place him, would have found no more affable acquaintance than Bishop Wycliffe.

The bishop presented no insoluble riddle to Leigh's mind. On the contrary, he had met his type before and knew it well; but with Miss Wycliffe the case was different. He recognized now the reason of Cardington's inability to describe her, for a categorical account of her features, or of what is commonly called her "good points," would have left the essential quality untouched. Yet this quality was the woman herself, and had fired Leigh's blood with a fever of longing that made him reckless of his judgment. In fact, he was not now absorbed in judging, but in realizing, the woman with whom he had fallen in love.

If she had appealed to him at any one moment more than at another, it was when she took him into her confidence with that sidelong look, as she slipped the novel into the large vase. Then, as at other times during the evening, but then more particularly, she had betrayed her consciousness of him as a young man, of herself as a woman and a beauty.

He saw that she had no desire to talk with him on the impersonal plane of the mind, that she welcomed, rather than feared, the discovery of her femininity, even in her political interests. She might say this or that, as the fancy took her, but she knew it made no difference to an admirer what she said. Her peculiar fascination lay in a consciousness of sex which is the explanation of the power to win men that distinguishes one woman above the many, to their envy and mystification.

Leigh was too attractive a man to have been allowed to reach his present age entirely ignorant of the psychology of women, though comparative poverty and laborious studies had limited his education in this direction, and left him unspoiled. He knew enough to realize the secret of Miss Wycliffe's charm, and to reflect consciously upon it in connection with himself. Mere beauty, he knew, would have left him cold, if it had not stirred within him the resentment aroused by a promise unfulfilled; intellectual gifts alone would have wearied and antagonised; evident virtue would have seemed humdrum and uninspiring. It was this delicious appeal of the woman to the man that had won him.

He was yet to learn that this quality is not seldom accompanied by the most baffling counter-current, that holds its natural movement in apparent suspension. Why had a woman so imperially endowed remained so long unmarried? It was not that she looked her age, which he felt to be little less than his own, but that she implied it by her lack of inexperience. It was not that eight or nine and twenty made a spinster from the modern point of view, but that to reach that age unmarried she must have resisted many a suit. Had he lived longer in New England, he would have known more women of this kind, women who hide the passionate heart of a Helen beneath the austere life of a Diana, hoarding their gifts of love as a miser hoards his gold, partly because of cruel necessity, partly influenced by the impulse to deny inherited from Puritan ancestors.

Suddenly he became aware that Cardington had been talking again, and that he had shown indifferent courtesy as a listener. He roused himself to attention, and detected at once the unusual flavour of his companion's remarks, from which all jest had gone, showing instead a poetical and reminiscent mood.

"The silhouettes of the trees which the electric light throws upon the walk," he was saying, "remind me of a wonderful moonlight night I once spent at Assisi. I was younger then than I am now, and it was my first journey in that land of enchantment. I travelled as lightly as one of the apostles, with staff and scrip, so to speak, and having resisted the efforts of the cabman at the station to rob me, I started to walk up to the city alone. I understand they have a trolley line now, — just imagine the profanation of a trolley line in the ancient city of St. Francis! — but at the time of which I speak, the atmosphere of the Middle Ages still hung over the place unbroken.

"The city lay above the valley, white-walled and silent. I remember touching with my stick what appeared to be a streak of moonlight that had filtered through the branches of a tree, when a beautiful little serpent uncoiled himself and slipped away into the shadows. Well, the distance was greater than I had supposed, and the hour was late, so that by the time I reached the city gate, I found it closed for the night. There was nothing to do but to sit down and wait for morning. I found a large, flat rock which seemed still to hold some of the heat of the sun, and looked out over the surrounding country. Just think of my situation! There I was, a young man fresh from America, full of the most extravagant romance, sitting alone in the moonlight before the gate of a mediæval walled city, and a city, too, so rich with traditions that I grew dazed in trying to recall them. It may be that the moon became hypnotic in its influence, for I lay down and stared up at it like one bewitched.

"I don't know how long a time passed in this manner before I was aroused by the appearance of an old peasant around the corner of my rock, bending under a huge bundle of faggots. I addressed myself to him in the best Italian I could then command, and asked whether it were possible to enter the city — *entrare la città*. He rung a bell by pulling a rope that hung down over the wall, and we went in together. Now, you know, I would have remained there all night without even looking for such an obvious way of arousing the gatekeeper."

"Yes," he continued, in answer to an appreciative comment from his listener, "you would have enjoyed it, — any one with a soul would have enjoyed it. And further adventures were in store for me in that ancient town. I remember particularly a girl who waited on the table at my *albergo* and accompanied me at times on my tours of inspection. From her I learned more of the history of the place, and upon her I practised most diligently my Italian. There was one mystery to which she would come back again and again. If I was an American, and poor, how did it happen that I was not an artist? She would turn her lovely eyes upon me twenty times a day and ask me this question. A charming experience, was it not? Long afterward I met an American professor on one of the boats in Holland, and when we compared notes on our travels, I discovered that he remembered that girl, too, and her eyes. Just think of the number of romantic young travellers upon whom she had turned them in that appealing way of hers!"

As his companion listened to this recital, he was impressed not so much by the story itself as by the essential happiness of the narrator. Here was a nature as untrammelled as the wind, that delighted to roam from land to land. Local interests, people, events, might hold him for a time, but presently he would be gone in search of new adventures. If he loved Felicity Wycliffe, Leigh reflected, it was only as a wanderer loves.

Cardington was laughing in his peculiar fashion. "You will say that my little story has a disappointing sequel; but, after all, perhaps it is less commonplace as it is. She will remain enshrined in my memory, and in the memory of those other travellers, as we saw her then, always young and beautiful, and always turning upon us those lovely, enquiring eyes. And, by the way, it is strange, is it not, that Miss Wycliffe should have eyes similar to those of my young guide in Assisi? As far as I know, she is of pure New England ancestry, and one does not meet very often in this climate a glance that suggests nocturnal mystery. No, no. The women here are different, as a rule. I remember her mother; she was something like, but in less perfection."

Leigh, fearing that he might perhaps say too much, said nothing at all by way of comment. Cardington's phrase, "nocturnal mystery," was a reminder of the scene through which he had passed thus far unheeding, and suggested its kinship with the woman of his thoughts. The vista seemed to stretch away interminably, disclosing unexpected glimpses of colour where the boughs displayed their changing leaves within the radius of an electric light. Between the lights the darkness gathered with the greater intensity because of the clouds which had now traversed the whole expanse of the sky and hidden the stars from view. He was conscious also of the ceaseless murmuring of the wind in the leaves, like many voices whispering in an unknown tongue.

CHAPTER V

THE CANDIDATE

LEIGH awoke the next morning with a sense that some profound change had come into his life. His mood was similar to that of a man on the verge of a trip to foreign lands, who, with all the humdrum existence that had earned it behind him, and all the delights of adventure before, waits only the turn of wind or tide to be away. The comparison is not inept, for he had lived laborious days, postponing deliberately or missing by chance, he scarcely knew which, the experience he now felt to be impending. His time of life was peculiarly favourable for the growth of a master passion, one which, as the old saying has it, might make or mar him. The feverish struggles of early youth had landed him in a position somewhat better than that attained by the majority of his contemporaries. He had reached a breathing-place, where he could pause with a sense of deeds accomplished and of possible rewards in the future.

A realisation of the fact that his circumstances and position fairly justified him in entertaining seriously the thought of love lessened in no way the ideality of that thought. It was not because Felicity

Wycliffe was the first attractive woman to come into his life at the right moment that he had fallen in love with her. He told himself that he could have met any other woman in the world at that time with impunity; and, conversely, had he met her years before, when his suit must needs have been hopeless, he would have loved her no less, reckless of worldly considerations. As it was, he did not feel that the situation was conventional, but that the fates were kind. His desire, and the right to strive for its attainment, had synchronised by happy chance.

In the history of a passion, it is doubtful if any mood is more elysian than that which accompanies the waking moments on the morning after the great discovery. Leigh wandered for some time in this imaginary paradise, where everything seemed not only possible, but actually accomplished. His rising, however, shook some of these iridescent colours from his thoughts, until they gradually began to assume the more sober hue of fact, a change like that which he now discovered had come over the outside world.

The storm, which had promised to be wild and spectacular, had somehow miscarried in the night, and instead of pelting showers and tossing branches he saw a pale grey wall of mist against his windows. All excitement had gone from the atmosphere, leaving the dreary certainty that the mist would presently clear only to condense into a slow, persistent, autumn rain. It is conceivable that he would not have exchanged his waking dreams so quickly for more definite thoughts and speculations had his eyes rested upon the blue hills of the western skyline, for he was peculiarly susceptible to the moods of nature. There being now practically no outside world to lure his fancy on, he began to think of his actual situation, and to ask himself what he intended to do with regard to the man in whom Miss Wycliffe had taken such an interest. If her plan appeared quixotic to him now, he feared that on second thoughts it might seem no less so to her, and he resolved to do the thing she desired, and to gain thereby a common interest with her, before she might discourage the attempt. This resolve taken, he went to breakfast at the college commons, and thence to chapel.

Attendance at chapel, he had discovered, was obligatory upon the students and upon those clerical members of the faculty who conducted the services. Personally he was drawn thither by the peculiar flavour which the exercises gave his daily life. It was pleasant to sit alone in his pew against the wall above the tiers of students, to watch the morning sunlight streaming through the stained glass windows, and to listen to the antiphonal singing of a fine old Rouen meditation. Occasionally the services began with a Sapphic ode by Gregory the Great, whose opening line, *Ecce iam noctis tenuatur umbra,* set to music from the Salisbury Hymnal, resounded through the arches of the chapel like a call to the duties of the day. In the institution from which he had recently come, the jealousy of rival sects had resulted in the complete elimination of all outward forms of worship; and he found the change grateful. There was novelty and charm in a service attended wholly by men, and in the music, as mediæval in character as the architecture of the Hall itself. Like most of his contemporaries, Leigh could by no means have formulated his religious beliefs, but in all the chaos of modern thought he still retained a certain piety, in the old Roman sense of the word, a loyalty to the traditions of his fathers which he would never have dignified by the name of faith.

He was happily unconscious of the fact that the eyes of many of the students were fixed upon him with keen observation. The self-contained young professor was as much an unknown quantity as any he asked them to find in the recitation-room. They were baffled by the impersonal attitude he had brought from the university, where the individual counted for little, and were inclined to attribute it to a disposition to be severe in his marking.

It chanced that this morning he was free from recitations, but though his time was his own, he had no definite plan with which to fill it. After lingering in his room for some minutes, he descended once more to the walk, finding relief in simulating a purpose by definiteness of action. Instead of following the line of the building northward, he struck out directly across the plateau, past the flagstaff and the great bronze statue of the bishop, and descended the slope along a path that marked the future grand approach.

As he recalled the bishop's elaborate description, he turned and gazed at the towers which loomed ghostlike beyond the ridge. He was now in the midst of the wide field from which he had heard the tinkle of cow-bells on the morning of his arrival. The place was deserted, save for his own presence. The grass was heavy with clinging globules of moisture, and every head of goldenrod seemed encrusted with glimmering pearls. Everywhere there was a curious and oppressive silence, as if the world were deprived not only of light, but also of life. The great towers appeared unsubstantial, carved from blocks of mist only a degree thicker than that which spread about him. He indulged the odd fancy that a rising wind might sweep the whole away, leaving only a bare hilltop beneath the clearing sky.

The clang of a gong from the car barn beyond came like a reminder of his purpose, a summons to make a tentative effort, at least, to achieve it. So he turned resolutely away, leaving academic dreams in the mist behind him.

The street-car barn was perhaps the dreariest spot in Warwick. Its proximity to the college grounds had caused the bishop to view it with disfavour, and already a fine ivy, planted at his suggestion, covered part of the bare brick walls. The bishop would fain have recalled the days that antedated electric roads, before the company had driven this peg at the corner of his academe and stretched therefrom another gleaming thread of its intricate web of trolley lines. Those were the golden days when one drove up to the Hall in a comfortable carriage, when the richer students went horseback riding along the country roads, when the *chug, chug* of the motor-car and its attendant smell of gasoline were unknown.

Though Leigh was far from sharing the bishop's whimsical indignation at this change, even he felt the chill unloveliness of the long reaches of the barn filled with lifeless cars, where an occasional electric bulb burned like an *ignis fatuus* in the misty gloom. How much more attractive a railroad round-house, with iron monsters on its converging tracks, each with his cyclopean eye of fire, each panting deeply with slow jets of steam!

The place was comparatively deserted. Far back in the barn dim figures moved, and from the work-house in the rear came the clang of metal. One or two passengers were waiting for the next car, and Leigh spied a conductor coming to his work, finishing the last few puffs of his morning pipe. He was an elderly man, with a sweeping grey moustache and a gait that suggested the sea. Behind him two small boys came racing with a cart.

"Hello!" cried the conductor, stepping aside with agility. "What's this? A Japanese torpedo boat?" He turned to Leigh genially. "I'll have to spread a net before my bows. These youngsters take me for a Rooshyan battleship."

It occurred to Leigh that this man might know Emmet well, and when the car came in, he stood on the back platform for the purpose of engaging him in talk that might help him in his project. The heavy morning traffic was over, and as the conductor was comparatively unoccupied, he accepted his passenger's advances readily. In a few minutes Leigh became aware that the man knew who he was.

"That's nothing wonderful," he explained. "I've been on this line for years, and I know everybody that travels this way. I thought you were the new professor at the Hall, the minute I set eyes on you."

In spite of the trim uniform, the cap and buttons, he seemed cast in a larger mould than most men of his kind. He was garrulous without offence, and carried with him some of the atmosphere which only travel gives. He was more fit, Leigh reflected, to command a ship, or to crack the whip over six horses from the seat of a stage-coach, than to pull the bell-rope on a Warwick street-car. It was easy enough to engage him in conversation about the coming election, but more difficult to arrive at the point he had in mind. He learned that Emmet had already resigned his place as a conductor to devote his whole time to the work of the campaign, and he began to appreciate the difficulty of meeting him naturally. If he went to his boarding-house, he would doubtless find him away, or not alone. On the whole, considering the shortness of the time and the different worlds in which they moved, he decided that he must make his opportunity, rather than wait for it to come.

"I believe you said that Mr. Emmet boards at your house," he ventured finally. "In that case, you might do me a little favour, if you will. The fact is, that I would like very much to make his acquaintance, but I hesitate to call upon him at random, knowing how busy he is. If he has a free hour some time, I 'd like to meet him."

"You 'd like to meet him?" the conductor asked shrewdly.

"This is n't politics," Leigh explained, aware of the other's guess, "and for that reason I want Mr. Emmet to consult his own convenience. If you 'll give him my card and tell him that we have a common friend who wishes us to know each other, he may think it worth while to drop me a postcard and make an appointment. I 'll come to see him any time he 's at liberty."

The conductor stowed the card away in his clothes with a peculiar lurch of his figure that reminded Leigh once more of his first impression.

"Am I right," he asked, "in guessing that you once followed the sea?"

"Twenty years," the man answered; "and though I've been ashore as many, they still call me captain — Captain Tucker. The salt water puts its stamp on a man for life, don't it? I was reminded of it this morning when I see in the paper that the Rooshyans had fired on the Hull fishermen off the Dogger Banks. What a shame that was, wa'n't it? Why, those fishermen are the most inoffensive fellows in the world. Many a time when I passed through that sea they'd throw up a fish on our deck by way of a present."

Leigh found the conversation which this reminiscence suggested so full of interest, that he made the complete circuit of the line to pursue it at such intervals as his new acquaintance could spare from his duties. Then, as the steaming rain had begun to fall heavily, he returned to the college. Upon a mental review of his trip, he was inclined to doubt that he would hear from Emmet, but in so doing he forgot to reckon with one of the most powerful of human motives, curiosity. He also failed to consider that his position as a professor at St. George's Hall would give his advances peculiar importance. His only fear was that the captain might not report the message correctly, and he wished he had been able to write a note. A remembrance of the man's geniality reassured him, and he reflected that such men were the most approachable and companionable in the world, always ready for a new acquaintance, and imbued with a certain fundamental humanity which is too often winnowed out from more artificial or more cultivated natures.

He went to his work that evening without much thought of the probable outcome of his morning's effort. Like most college professors, he had a number of unfinished problems on hand, any one of which might require years for its solution. The scholar's work, like the housekeeper's, is never done, and like the housekeeper, too, he can cover up his postponements and neglect for a measurable time without censure. He can fail to set the house of his mind in order; he can sweep the dust of unfinished investigation into obscure nooks and corners; he can make fair the outside of the cup and the platter for cursory inspection. Herein lies his peculiar temptation. The public is prone to take his scientific spirit for granted, and is a long time in opening its eyes. Meanwhile he lives a life of delightful leisure, teaching as many hours a week as a business man labours in a day. Not one man in a hundred is proof against the seduction of those idle hours, during which literature and art and a cultivated society plead for some share of his attention and filch away his will. And, after all, why not? he begins to ask himself. In a commercial age and a country that thinks upon the surface, his profession receives no adequate recognition. Life is short; he had better reap the reward of his laborious and expensive preparation by enjoying those diversions which he of all men is peculiarly fitted to appreciate.

Leigh honestly meant to be the hundredth man, and to make a name for himself. He had found what might be called an easy place in contrast with the drudgery of the large classes he had previously taught. Here was the time, here the problem. The lamp was trimmed, the white sheets of paper were spread out invitingly on his desk. A few logs burned brightly in the fireplace, dispelling the penetrating chill, and the rain beat heavily against the windows, intensifying the distance of the world and his own seclusion.

But now a face hovered between his eyes and the paper on his desk; then the complete figure of the woman he loved came into view, pointing with her small ivory cimeter another and more alluring road. As one may lie and doze awhile in the morning, with a resentful realisation of the impending duties of the day, so now he allowed himself ten minutes of respite, only to discover presently that his allowance had lengthened imperceptibly to an hour.

A knock at the door aroused him, and he shouted an invitation to enter, thinking that Cardington had stepped across the hallway for a chat. His surprise therefore was great when the door swung open and showed an unknown man placing his dripping umbrella in the corner.

"I got your message, professor," the visitor began. Leigh was instantly aware, above everything else, of the extraordinarily alert glance which he flung into the room ahead of him as he entered. This summed up his total first impression.

"Mr. Emmet!" he cried. "Come in. This is really too bad. I 'm afraid Captain Tucker did n't give you the message correctly. I meant to call upon you. He must have represented that I had some urgent business — but I need n't say how I appreciate your coming, especially on such a night."

"All kinds of weather are alike to me," Emmet answered heartily. "I was up in this part of town, and thought I might better drop in and see you than send a postal."

Now that he was seated, Leigh had a better opportunity for observation, and his fuller impression was decidedly favourable. Emmet was apparently about his own age, of medium height, with the shoulders and bearing of an athlete. He possessed no strikingly fine feature, and yet the whole man was handsome. One took no notice of the shape of his nose or the line of his chin, for these points were neither excellent nor the reverse. What gave him a claim to distinction above his fellows was the splendidly abundant vitality that appeared unmistakably in the rich colour of his cheeks, in his very posture, and in the brightness of his reddish-brown eyes. It remained to be seen whether this brightness might indicate intellect as well as health. For the rest, for the quality that betrayed the man, his expression was not to be read at a glance. Its major message seemed to be goodfellowship, but the seeming failed to strengthen into certainty on closer inspection. Here was a man who could think hiddenly, speak guardedly, wait for others to show their cards, and do all this with a disarming appearance of ingenuous friendliness. The atmosphere he radiated as he sat waiting for his host to explain himself was one of tension without nervousness.

Leigh began as most men would have begun under the circumstances. He fostered the subject of the weather for a few minutes longer, and produced a box of cigars.

"I never smoke, or drink either, for that matter," Emmet remarked simply. "A politician is like a barkeeper; he can do his business better if he lets drink alone. As for cigars, try one of mine. They 're part of my stock in trade. I guess this one won't explode and set fire to the place."

Leigh smiled as he lighted the cigar, which he found to be a good one. There was something that made for freedom in the unintentional officiousness with which his guest had thrust aside his hospitality and substituted his own.

"Possibly," he ventured, "you might imagine that I have some plan in mind to hand over to you the vote of the college."

"A deal like that would please the bishop," Emmet returned, with unexpected irony.

"It would please his daughter, at any rate, as I believe you know."

"Yes," Emmet assented, with a nod. "I know what a good friend of mine Miss Wycliffe is."

"We were talking last night," Leigh continued, "about political conditions here in Warwick, and I became very much interested, for municipal reform is one of my hobbies. Wherever I 've lived, I 've always been against the machine, at least to the extent of my vote. Miss Wycliffe told me that you were trying to break up the clique that has ruled Warwick since the war; and when she saw how much she had enlisted my sympathy, she proposed that we become acquainted. That 's how I happened to send a message to you by the captain. I did n't know when you were likely to be most at liberty." He paused, and flicked the ashes from his cigar. "I feel guilty to think that I have stolen some of your time, when I have nothing to give you in return but good wishes."

It was impossible to guess whether Emmet were surprised or disappointed at this disclosure of the comparative futility of his visit.

"Good wishes," he said, "are always worth having, and especially from this college, for I tell you there are mighty few men connected with this place that wish me well."

Leigh, remembering the bishop and Cardington, did not doubt the truth of this declaration. He wondered what his colleague would surmise should he come in at that moment. The situation would be complicated, and would no doubt gain in interest, but it was an interest he was content to forego. He was impressed by a hint of passion and resentment in his guest's voice, restrained as by one not entirely sure of his hearer.

In Leigh's attitude there was no affectation. He was genuinely interested in the situation, and he brought to it all a Westerner's lack of class prejudice, all his appreciation of a man for his intrinsic worth, irrespective of college degrees and family and fortune. It was some time before Emmet, feeling his way by little and little, realised the anomaly of a professor in St. George's Hall with Democratic sympathies. Miss Wycliffe's judgment of the two men, her belief that they would get on well together, was entirely justified by the result, which became undoubted before an hour had passed. Emmet was by no means lacking in shrewdness, and, having once become convinced that caution was needless, he talked more freely, until, to his listener's interested observation, he appeared quite another man. He began to show some of that eloquence of which Cardington had spoken, an eloquence that derived its effect not from the artifices of rhetoric, but from a deep conviction and a personal grievance. He spoke in adequate language, that left no doubt of his meaning, and the meaning itself was sufficiently striking to rivet attention. Leigh began to realise why it was that the bishop had thought him dangerous. He forgot to wonder at Emmet's gift of speech in the new point of view that was gradually presented to his mind. He was struck particularly by the fact that St. George's Hall, which seemed to him comparatively insignificant in the educational world, should loom so large in this man's horizon that the towers which stood to him for star-gazing and cloistered study and old tradition should appear to Emmet merely the bulwarks of class privilege and social tyranny.

The fact that Leigh was a stranger in Warwick must have given his guest a peculiar sense of freedom. One has only to recall the confidences which men that meet casually on the train will sometimes repose in each other, to realise how this can be. Under such circumstances, each tells his story to unprejudiced ears, without fear that it will one day be turned to his disadvantage. Nor was this the first time in Leigh's life when he had been surprised to find himself the recipient of another's secrets. The conversation finally became almost a monologue, or, more specifically, a statement of grievances.

"I would n't mind, if the campaign were being conducted on the square," said Emmet, now thoroughly aroused; "but it is n't. It 's hard work to talk against money, and they 've got barrels of it. They 're putting it now where it will do the most good. A thousand dollars to this saloon-keeper and another thousand to that, to keep their heelers away from the polls on election day, may do the trick for them, no matter what I say or do or am. And it 's college-bred men, professional men, who are doing it. The whole of the wealthy and educated element of Warwick is leagued against me, and bound to beat me by fair means or foul."

"Corruption in politics is common enough everywhere, I 'm afraid," Leigh remarked.

"It 's worse here," Emmet declared bitterly; "and here it 's a question of class against class as well. Warwick is said to be the wealthiest city of its size in the country, and the offices have been handed around in a certain set ever since the Declaration of Independence. The labour unions are uncommonly strong, too, and if they would only hang together, they could have things their own way. I can depend upon the support of my own crowd, but there are always mutual jealousies to be reckoned with between the various unions. Besides, the labouring man will talk boldly enough at times about equality, but he still has a sneaking admiration for the fellow that lives in a big house, and a corresponding distrust of one of his own kind. Let me give you an illustration of it. The other day, Judge Swigart's manager, Anthony Cobbens, was swaggering around the barn down here, talking with some of the men about his horses and dogs, and poking a little fun at me on the side. Such things have their effect. I heard one of the men say afterward that Cobbens was as friendly with them as if he were n't rich at all. It 's a fact that he was flattered by the fellow, even when he saw through him."

There was something rather magnificent in the scorn that blazed in the speaker's eyes as he told this incident, and Leigh felt that, no matter what his faults might be, sycophancy never was and never could be one of them.

"It 's all the more pitiful," he remarked, "because he gets nothing for it but the contempt he deserves. But I 've heard of this Cobbens. It seems to me that Miss Wycliffe compared him to a weasel."

Emmet laughed, but almost immediately the intensity of his mood returned. "Cobbens is one of your own graduates," he went on, almost as if he held his listener responsible for that fact. "I knew him as a boy, and played with him on the streets. Perhaps that 's the reason he 's my worst enemy to-day. His mother was a dressmaker and a widow, but somehow, by hook and by crook, he managed to work his way through St. George's Hall. Then he became a lawyer and married one of the richest girls in town. What she saw in him, nobody knows, but he's a hypnotist, and no mistake. Now she's dead, and so are her parents, and Cobbens and his mother live in her great house and ride in her carriages. He's a high roller, right in with the judge and his crew, and there isn't a more corrupt politician in this town. There's a fine specimen of your college graduate!"

"I hope you don't regard him as a typical college graduate," Leigh protested good-naturedly.

Had he been familiar with the alumni of the Hall, he could have made his argument strong by personal examples unlike Anthony Cobbens, but he made his defence of the college graduate general, answering the well-known objections to him in the well-known way. It was evident that Emmet regarded colleges and universities as identified with entrenched privilege everywhere, and with corruption in local politics particularly. It was inevitable that he should have been influenced in this view by his own concrete experiences. The iron had entered into his soul, and its scar was not to be effaced by an evening's conversation. Not infrequently life will be interpreted to a passionate nature by one or two persons, be they friends or enemies. To Emmet, Cobbens and the bishop loomed much larger in the general scheme of things than their intrinsic importance warranted. It was interesting, having heard the bishop's opinion of Emmet, to get Emmet's view of the bishop, a view that was by no means without a certain reluctant respect and admiration. Leigh felt that his prejudice was impassioned, rather than intellectual, and would yield gradually to a change of circumstances, whereas the bishop would never revise his judgment. He was impressed also by the fact that Miss Wycliffe could never fully appreciate the conditions that had produced the man whose cause she had chosen to champion, or see that he must needs be a radical, if he thought at all, at least in the present stage of his development. Leigh's own experience in life enabled him to look into both camps with comprehension, for he belonged to the comparatively small class of the cultivated poor, and his struggles had been no less intense than those of the man before him, though for different ends. The effect of what he said was conciliatory, but his visitor was merely convinced that this particular college graduate was an exception to the rule.

"You 're not much like the bishop," he remarked. "I don't say that he is n't the real thing in the way of a gentleman, but he 's as proud as the Old Boy himself."

"I don't know how proud the Old Boy may be," Leigh answered, laughing, "or what he has to be proud of, but I 've discovered that Bishop Wycliffe, underneath his apparent frigidity, has one of the kindest hearts in the world."

"We all know that," Emmet assented. "He 's one of the most charitable men in town. I 'm bound to say, too, that he does n't know anything about the inside workings of that political ring, but it 's because he does n't want to know. He just naturally ranges himself with his own class on such a question."

He had progressed from an alertness that was not free from suspicion to a fervid statement of the political situation, into which the element of his personal feelings had risen more and more to the surface. So naturally did he appear to take the mention of Miss Wycliffe that Leigh had not realised how deeply flattered he must have been by her interest. Now, at last, his very posture showed a sense of being at home, and into the brightness of his steady eyes an expression entered which could best be described as confidential.

"I meant to ask you," he said, "who it was that began to talk about me at the bishop's."

Leigh considered a moment. "We were all discussing politics — I really don't remember."

"And did Miss Wycliffe take my part against the old man?"

The question arrested Leigh's attention, and traversed his consciousness with a positive shock. It was he who was now on guard. He would have repudiated the insinuation that he was jealous, and yet, when a man is in love, jealousy in some sort may extend even to those who cannot possibly be his rivals. As he divined that Emmet was inclined to put too personal an interpretation upon Miss Wycliffe's generosity of feeling, he was concerned to think that she might have misplaced it, that this man might have the presumption to misunderstand her. He became singularly forgetful of what had occurred at the bishop's house, and seemed not to hear a further intimation from Emmet, to the effect that he believed Miss Wycliffe was more than a match for her father. It was now that Emmet discovered a greater possibility of likeness between the bishop and his host than he had suspected so short a time before. His evident curiosity in regard to Miss Wycliffe's real purpose in sending the professor to him remained ungratified, and the necessity which now faced him of retreating from a position in which he had not been met caused him to take his actual departure presently with something of his earlier restraint of manner. They separated, like Glaucus and Diomedes, representatives of different camps, who entertained for each other personally the greatest good-will and respect. It may be, however, that each gave this assurance with mental reservations more or less subconscious.

When Leigh was once more alone, he walked up and down his room restlessly for some time. His first sensation was one of exasperation with Miss Wycliffe for her ill-advised championship of a man who actually seemed to have the assurance to think of her otherwise than as his patroness and good friend from afar. If she suffered embarrassment from it in the future, he reflected, that was only what she might have anticipated. It would be a delicate matter to let her know her mistake. More than that — it would be impossible. Her own instinct and good sense would come to her rescue in time. Meanwhile, there was Emmet. It was delightful to think how she had failed to see his point of view, while sure that she saw it so well. He could not wonder that the man's head was slightly turned, and now that he was gone, Leigh felt no personal resentment on that score. As he reviewed the conversation of the evening, he wondered which were really the more dangerous to the state, Emmet, full of personal grievances and undigested theories, or his opponent, Judge Swigart, the cynical and aristocratic politician. If Emmet desired at present to turn the existing order of things topsy-turvy, it was because such a revolution would place him at the top. The judge, already nearer the top, was naturally a champion of things as they were, which included his position as it was. Though Leigh mused in this sophisticated vein, he nevertheless felt considerable confidence that the younger man, when he became a finished product, would be a better citizen than his political rival.

CHAPTER VI

LENA HARPSTER

THE bell in the cupola of the First Church had just rung out the hour of midnight, and the slow, deep notes, which seemed to derive a certain solemnity from the graveyard below, were carried in broken echoes to the very suburbs of the city on the wings of a moist, intermittent wind. The storm of the previous night, which had lifted during the day, now seemed about to begin anew, and the air was full of a sense of unshed rain. Down in the street, where bits of waste paper and other small refuse spun around under the swaying electric lights, the huge cleaner, called "the devil waggon," was just beginning its nocturnal task. In front of the City Hall, lately such a scene of busy life, a solitary car stood ready to start upon its homeward trip, its two violet lamps winking in the wind like a pair of sleepy eyes. Only the all-night drug-store on the opposite corner kept up an appearance of wakefulness by means of a corona of milk-white lights that made a brilliant spot in the comparative obscurity of the long thoroughfare.

Whatever poetical or imaginative suggestions might lie in this scene for others, it made no such appeal to Tom Emmet as he strode along, passing belated pedestrians in his course. He had just come from a protracted consultation with his political lieutenants, and deep in the maze of his own plans the twelve beats of the bell now reminded him that Lena Harpster must have been waiting for his coming a full hour by the gate where they had planned to meet. Even this thought could scarcely soften his mood as yet. Sure of the experience that awaited him, he was content to postpone it till the actual moment. Politics was a fact, and his love was a fact, and each was assigned its appropriate time. This eye for the actualities of the moment was characteristic of the man. A street to him was only a thoroughfare, in which there were certain things that concerned him personally, or through which he must pass to reach a definite destination. To Leigh, on the contrary, it was sometimes a comparative unreality, a vista suggesting thoughts of Thebes and Babylon and Rome, a symbol of life's pilgrimage, a path where multitudinous sounds blended into a universal chant of the voyager. It was perhaps this difference that constituted an element of attraction between the two men. The star-gazer admired the practical qualities that made for success in the world below his tower, and the politician paid an involuntary tribute to a spirituality above his own.

Lena Harpster also heard the midnight bell, as she stood in the shadow of a row of tall brick mansions and gazed patiently down the alley, listening for her lover's step. She was undoubtedly as pretty a girl as could be found in Warwick; so pretty, in fact, that when she applied for a position as maid, experienced housekeepers were wont to balance her attractions against the probity of their men-folk. Not infrequently they decided that the former might weigh heavier in the scale, and reserved the place for one less favoured. She was tall and slender, with a light step and a winning grace of movement. When she spoke, her voice was pitched in a key that was pleasantly low and musical, whether from lack of physical force, or because of timidity, or in unconscious imitation of those she served. But more likely this characteristic was merely an expression of innate refinement; for Lena was of native American stock, educated in a country school of some merit; and she regarded herself as a lady, compared with the Irish maids and coloured cooks among whom her lot was cast.

Her throat was long, with a skin of peculiar whiteness. When her sleeves were rolled back while she washed the most valuable of her mistress's glasses, her arms were seen to be of such a satin smoothness as to invite instinctively a caressing touch. And one felt assured, without trying the experiment, that her resentment at such a liberty would be expressed only by a gentle and deprecatory withdrawal. This same whiteness of her complexion was enhanced rather than marred by the presence of a few faint freckles, that suggested sunny fields and the wholesome associations of country life. When excited, her grey eyes shone with a luminous brightness, as if all her vitality were gathered there, while an unexpected colour came and went beneath the delicate texture of her skin.

But of all Lena's attractions, none was more marked than her smile. It was frequent and unaffected, almost maternal in its good nature and indulgence, and disclosed two rows of little teeth, pure and fragile in appearance as porcelain. Yet this smile, so inviting to those who wished to be invited, was disillusioning to cooler and more discriminating observers, for in it her ordinary quality was disclosed, her redundancy of sweetness, her lack of that intellect which enables a woman to triumph over the ravages of time.

As she waited there by the gate, she marked the lapse of time by the cars that passed the end of the alley at intervals of fifteen minutes, occupied not so much with thoughts as with sensations, both those of the moment and those of anticipation. The air was delightfully soft, like that of springtime, and she responded to its caress much as a flower responds, lifting her face placidly to the sky. The atmosphere had now reached the point of saturation, and her fine hair was moistened as by a heavy dew.

From time to time she gave an affectionate touch to some small creature which she held warmly in the bend of her arm beneath her cape, or turned her head to listen to the stamping of the horses in a near-by stable. Directly across the alley, a large, half-finished building lifted its walls in the dim light, like a ruin, exhaling from its yawning windows a mingled odour of fresh pine boards and plaster; and toward these squares of blackness she sometimes turned a look almost childish in its suggestion of vague timidity.

At last, when she had lingered long past the time agreed upon, she sighed, but without resentment, and resigned herself to disappointment. She wished to see him this night in particular, for she had something of importance to tell. He had forbidden her to write, and she accepted this tyranny as she accepted the man. Without reflecting deeply upon this elaborate caution of his, the secrecy of their courtship made an appeal to a certain demand of her own nature for concealment and mystery. Where a spirited girl would have questioned and resented, she merely acquiesced.

She had almost abandoned hope when she caught sight of him in the circle of electric light at the far end of the alley. He gave a quick look to left and right before turning in her direction. She would have known that alert turn of the head in any crowd, and now, as his footsteps sounded nearer and nearer along the narrow board walk that skirted the fences, she unlatched the gate and came out to meet him. When almost upon her, his eyes caught first the white strip of apron beneath her dark cape, and then the dim little face above bending forward for a greeting.

"Well," he said, in a low tone, "did you think I was never coming, girlie?"

She leaned against him with a contented sigh. "You have come, Tom, and that 's all I care about."

As he pressed her to him, the kitten, which had lain concealed till now in purring contentment beneath her cape, leaped to the ground and disappeared in the darkness.

"How I hate a cat!" he exclaimed, startled. "I 'd like to set my dog on the beast." His irritation merely elicited a little ripple of amusement, for though she was submissive to his will, she was never afraid of his censure. "Come," he continued; "this is no place to stand. We will go into that new building across the way."

He took her hand and guided her between scattered blocks of stone, over a shaking plank, and into the darkness she never would have ventured to enter alone. The large room in which they found themselves was already floored. The smell of fresh plaster, which was perceptible even from without, was here intensified, and he sniffed it with relish, for such works of construction always appealed to his nature. An open window, facing the street, admitted a misty illumination from the electric light beyond, and disclosed in one corner a heap of boards.

"Now," he said eagerly, taking her almost roughly by the shoulders and turning her about, "give me a kiss."

All the graciousness and charm were with her, all the strength with him. He was an abrupt and dictatorial lover, but she was a born sweetheart. At the moment when her arms were twined about him she most perfectly expressed herself. He drank in her kisses thirstily; then grasped her wrists firmly and removed them from his neck, as if he realised a peculiar responsibility.

"There, Lena," he protested, "that will do." But he still continued to hold her wrists. "Just like a couple of pipestems," he remarked. "How easily I could break them!"

She accepted the comment as a tribute to her delicacy, a proof of his strength. It was this strength that drew her, so that she swayed toward him involuntarily; but even though it contained an element of possible cruelty, it was not purely physical. Perhaps a realisation of this fact allowed her to shelve upon him entirely the responsibility of her impulsiveness.

"Come over here, Tom," she pleaded, drawing him into the corner, "and sit down. I want to tell you something. Besides, I'm half dead with standing."

The hint of pathos in her last words was lost upon him, for he was almost incapable of appreciating physical weariness. He knew her ready forgiveness also so well that he took it for granted, without even offering an explanation of his lateness. It was characteristic of their relationship that he felt no desire to tell, nor she to hear, the details of the political struggle now drawing to a close. She was too purely his sweetheart to share his cares; her loving embrace sufficed for their lightening. Even in the shadow of their retreat they could see each other's faces distinctly, hers moonlike, with hair like an halo of the moon, and his of more swarthy hue. If she was beautiful in his eyes, he fulfilled no less her ideal of manhood; and certainly an impartial witness could not have said that either judgment was unfounded.

"Well," he began, after surveying her a few moments with appreciation, "out with it. Some new man is chasing after you. Who is he?"

She leaned her face against his shoulder, then sat up and shook her head prettily, pleased with the thought of his jealousy.

"I can't help it, Tom. That impudent little Hollister Pyle won't give me a moment's peace."

"What does he do?" Emmet catechised grimly.

"He makes a grab for me every time I pass him on the stairs; that is, when his mother is n't looking."

"Why don't you turn around and break his face?" he demanded angrily, lapsing into graphic vernacular. The suggestion was obviously too absurd to need reply. "I 'd like to get my hands on the young whelp," he went on, squaring his shoulders. "I would n't leave a whole bone in his body."

"You can't do that, Tom, dear," she expostulated, in gentle alarm.

"No, I can't," he admitted reluctantly. "It would n't do to be pinched for assault and battery only a fortnight before election. I won't write him a threatening anonymous letter, either. That is n't my way of doing business. I tell you, Lena, you 've got to get rid of him, yourself."

"I will," she declared, with what was, for her, a tone of decision. "I 'm going to leave to-morrow."

"That is n't getting rid of him; that 's running away," he fumed, profoundly dissatisfied. "You 'll meet the same sort of thing in the next place. Why don't you stay and fight it out?"

"I don't like the girls, either," she explained. "They 're all against me."

"A lot of cats," he muttered. "But where are you going?"

"To Bishop Wycliffe's."

"No!" he cried.

"Why not?" she questioned. "It 's an easier place than this one. There are no young men there, Tom. That ought to satisfy you. I saw Miss Wycliffe to-day."

"I don't like the bishop," he said, with some hesitation, as if aware of the lameness of the objection, "and he does n't like me. There 's no man in this town more opposed to me than he is. I don't want you to go there."

"You never let me do what I want to, Tom," she complained despairingly.

He caught her in his arms and gave her an exasperated kiss. The logic of the argument was with her, and he could meet it only by an unreasonable prohibition. "I don't want you to go, anyhow," he reiterated.

"But I 've got to go somewhere," she insisted, placing her two hands upon his shoulders. She attempted to give him a little shake, with the result that she shook only herself. His physical immobility was so suggestive of his mental attitude that she desisted, with sudden meekness, and the point was apparently settled as he wished. He possessed himself of her hand, and began to stroke the inside of her arm, as if he had discovered a new charm in her.

"If you did n't give him what he deserved, what did you do, Lena?" he demanded, going back to the incident that had aroused his jealousy.

"I drew away, Tom."

"As gentle as a kitten, and without a word, too, I 'll be bound. You 're altogether too pretty — that 's the trouble with you. I ought to put you in a cage, to keep you safe."

"Tom, dear," she said suddenly, "I hear the Pyles talking about politics when I wait on the table. They say that you have n't the ghost of a chance to be elected. Now that you 've thrown up your job, what will you do if you are defeated?"

He emitted a short laugh, expressive of confidence and scorn. "You were n't such a little fool as to suppose I intended to stand on the back of a street-car all my life, were you? Five years of that sort of thing is about enough for me, and I 've worked it for all it was worth." A desire to impress her overcame his innate secretiveness. "There 's more in that job than the measly salary the company pays; and a man 's entitled to take something of what would be his by rights if things were as they should be in this world. There 's a higher law than the law made by the privileged few for their own enriching, and sometimes a man has to take the matter into his own hands and decide what 's due him." This was rather an elaborate way of telling her that, like most of his fellows, he was accustomed to "knock down" fares on crowded trips, when it could be done undetected. Perhaps he took some satisfaction in going over again the arguments by which he justified the practice. Perhaps he was curious to see whether she would make a condemnatory comment, but nothing was further from her thoughts, and he went on. "I have n't spent a cent of my baseball salary for years. Where do you suppose it is?"

"In the savings bank?" she suggested.

He chuckled at her simplicity. "Better than that — salted down — invested. I could live on the interest of it, after a fashion, if I wanted to." He was flattered by her wide-eyed admiration and wonder, and moved to disclose himself to her still more. "Why, look here, Lena, there 's more than politics in this game. They say I have n't the ghost of a show. We 'll see about that; but whichever way it turns out, I shan't be a beggar. Only, if I am elected, I 'll take every cent I 've got and put it into the bonds the city is going to issue to build the new bridge. There 's nothing better in the country than the bonds of this town. None of your Central America rubber bonds or Colorado mining stock for me. I want something I know about and can keep my eye on."

"Then you are n't poor!" she cried gladly. "You 're rich!"

He squared his jaw determinedly, and his eyes glowed. "Not rich yet, but I will be — I will be yet!"

She did not doubt that he could be anything he wished, but from this very confidence in his power a great fear was born. She put her lips close to his ear, and whispered tremulously: "Tom, dear, I know you think I'm pretty, and all that, but do you love me, Tom? When you get to be mayor, or when you're rich, will you love me just the same? You won't be too proud to think of marrying me then? Tell me you won't!"

She withdrew herself and placed her hands on his shoulders as before, an attitude pathetically suggestive of her effort to fix his attention upon her words. The poise of her little head was extremely winning in her desire for his admiration. "Do you think I would make a pretty wife, even for a mayor?" she faltered.

He caught her once more in his arms, as if the word wife had awakened within him a curious intensity of feeling, but for once she was not satisfied. Gradually her slender form became shaken by a storm of convulsive sobs. He waited in silence, with all a primitive man's uncomprehending distress at a woman's tears.

"Don't borrow trouble, Lena," he said simply. The tone, more than the words, showed that his mood had become stern, almost resentful. In fact, it was the first time she had given him anything but pleasure, and pleasure was all he desired from her.

His answer was not what she had hoped for, but her woman's wisdom forbade her to press the matter then. Of his love she felt no doubt; the intensity of his look, the well-nigh fierce impulsiveness of his caresses, showed her that the appeal she made to him was almost irresistible. Almost, but not quite. She could never be in his company long without a consciousness of the warring elements within him — on this side love, on that side ambition, fighting foot to foot and point to point, neither strong enough to win the victory. Sometimes he would gaze at her in silence, with his warm, speculative eyes, until, drawn like a fascinated bird, she fluttered to his arms in the hope of the great decision, but her hope was never realised. Now she divined that tears and prayers would not help her cause; he must be allured by her charm, not driven by her claims upon his compassion.

At this thought she recovered her composure and dried her eyes, and strove with success to make him forget her importunity. Disarmed and soothed, he sunk down to a lower seat beside her and rested his head boyishly upon her lap. He pushed back her short sleeve, nestled his face in the bend of her arm, and kissed it hungrily. The action, their relative positions, introduced a new element into their relationship, to which her deep maternal instinct made quick response. With a new tenderness she threw the fold of her cape about his head and shoulders, and held him close. Thus they sat for some time in silence. Beyond the warm shelter of her cape he heard the faint soughing of the wind, which had brought the rain at last, a drowsy and monotonous rain that lulled his senses. Instinctively he rested heavily upon her in weary abandonment. Finally his form relaxed, and she saw that he was fast asleep.

The strain of the position upon her back and arms grew greater each moment, till it was almost more than she could endure; but still she held out bravely, fearing to move lest she should wake him from the sleep he seemed so much to need. She knew also that his waking would mean separation, and she could not bear that thought as yet, before she had discovered the secret of success. What could she do more than she had done to make herself indispensable to him? That was the question which she turned over in her mind with such intensity that she almost lost her sense of growing distress. Indeed, the distress of body and mind seemed strangely one, the physical tension but an expression of the mental.

It was idle, she reflected, to think of studying politics to keep pace with his widening interests. She had only a vague conception of the extent to which his mind had been enlarged by contact with the world, but she was shrewd enough to know that companionship in such interests was not what he desired in her. In her he sought only rest and charm and love. Nor was it dress in which she lacked, unless, indeed, he desired her to deck herself like the rich women of the society he scorned. Just as a nurse's habit possesses a fascination for some men, so she had seen that her little cap, her very apron, though badges of servitude, made a peculiar appeal to his tenderness. Other men, too, had thought them becoming. It was a dress to reveal her beauty. Her curves were the softer for its severity, her colour the more radiant against that black and white. On the street also she knew he could find no fault with her. Like many a pretty woman of her class, she possessed a skill in dressing like a lady, and ability in making small means cover great needs, that amounted to genius. No—there was only one thing to do, and that was to love him more and more, until a consciousness of her love so pervaded him, even when absent, that he must finally come back to her to stay.

The cars had long since ceased to pass, and the silence of the dead of night settled down over the city. She heard the coloured cook saying good-bye to her lover at the gate where she herself had waited, their low, melodious voices and happy gurgles of laughter as soft as the damp wind that came puffing in through the open window. After what seemed an interminable lapse of time, an automobile went past, like a miniature whirlwind, dashing the raindrops right and left from its gleaming sides, bearing some late revellers through the deserted streets at a rate of speed forbidden by the traffic of the day. Even that incident became a distant memory, and now only the occasional howl of a prowling cat broke the stillness, a strangely ominous and mournful sound. In the bar of light upon the floor at her feet the shadow of the tossing branches of a tree moved continually, till she closed her eyes in dizziness.

Hours passed, hours that seemed a lifetime. The pain extended through her whole frame, and tears of mute suffering dropped slowly down upon the flap of the cape that kept her lover warm. From time to time she shifted her position gently and won a temporary relief, but presently the sense of strain returned, and yet she would not waken him and let him go. It was the first time she had ever seen him asleep, — one of love's tenderest experiences, — and moreover he was sleeping with a sense of absolute peace and security in her arms. She longed to slip down beside him, to rest her cheek against his, and to go with him into that shadowy world of dreams.

Suddenly out of the darkness a soft little form, wet with the rain, leaped lightly upon her. The discarded kitten had found its mistress at last. Gentle as the impact was, it sufficed to disturb her balance, and she sank slowly downward in a faint. Her arm, locked about his head, saved her from a fall, but the pressure of her body awoke him. He struggled confusedly, oppressed by a sense of suffocation and by a vague fear; then, scarcely awake, he caught her in his arms.

"Lena!" he cried, startled by the inexplicable change. "Lena!"

He touched her cheek, he listened in vain to hear her breathe, and then an icy terror gripped his heart. Scarcely knowing what he did or why, he raised her carefully in his arms and carried her to the window, where the fine rain sifted in upon her face. He felt her shiver slightly, and then her eyes were looking into his.

"Thank God!" he said brokenly. "I thought that you were dead."

She smiled, and moved her face toward him. He took her once more to their former seat, and continued to hold her in his arms as if she were a child.

"I feel better now," she murmured. "It was nothing, Tom. You fell asleep, and I held your head until I toppled over — that was all. Were you frightened?"

"I thought you were dead," he repeated, deeply awed by the grim spectre so foreign to his experience.

"And did you care so very much?" she ventured, her heart beginning to beat high again. For answer he gently raised her cheek to his and held her close. There was no need of words to tell her how much he was moved, for he had never held her thus before. Through her lover's strange moods of fierce tenderness and stern denial she had won her way at last, as she now believed, to a perfect understanding. He could not live without her; it was merely a question of time.

His continued tenderness gave her reason to believe that this assurance was justified. Only at the gate, when he bade her good-night, did he seem to be seized once more in the grip of contending emotions. He started to go without a word or kiss, then, turning back, he took her in his arms with a grip that hurt, calling her his Lena, his little girl, his wife. The last word broke from him with an intensity that caused the blood to riot in her heart, a joy that was shot through with wondering fear of the passion she had aroused.

When his figure had disappeared in the darkness, she left the gate and entered the kitchen through the low window which the cook had left unlocked against her coming. She lighted a candle, and looked at herself curiously in a mirror that hung on the wall. The grain of the cheap glass distorted her features, but reflected faithfully her heightened colour and the drops that sparkled like jewels in her light hair. Apparently she was satisfied with the inspection, for she smiled happily, and then went slowly upstairs to her narrow room beneath the roof.

Meanwhile, Emmet was striding along the gleaming street, regardless of the increasing rain that soaked him to the skin. From time to time he shot out his arm violently, as if he would push back some invisible foe, or would extricate himself from the meshes of a net that was closing in upon him. Again, he swore aloud, as one who curses a malign and unmerited fate.

CHAPTER VII

THE STAR-GAZERS

IN the following night the storm terminated its triduan existence some time between darkness and dawn. It must have been in the earlier hours that the change occurred, for Warwick gazed from its windows in the morning to find the ground rimed with hoar-frost, that looked like streaks of crusted salt. The sun was scarcely three hours in the ascendant before the frost disappeared, like the withdrawal of a silvery veil, disclosing the bareness it had beautified so briefly. Even the most casual observer could now see that autumn had made a long forward march in the last three days toward the confines of winter.

That afternoon Leigh called upon Miss Wycliffe, not without a thought that the interval which had elapsed since the dinner was decidedly short. Still, he would come ostensibly to report the result of the interview she had suggested, and, as the election was not far distant, he felt that this excuse, if one were needed, was entirely adequate. To his chagrin, he found that she was not at home. The maid informed him further that she had gone to New York for a week. As he walked slowly away, he wondered almost resentfully at this sudden disappearance, as if he felt that she ought to stay in Warwick and watch the result of her experiment. But he did not consider that if the daughters of men would be clothed like the lilies of the field, they must seek periodically the place most remote from the solitude in which their models grow.

The week that followed was one in which autumn flung out all her brave banners in a final pageantry. The nights were cold and still, with stars peculiarly brilliant. Each morning the mists hung like fleecy cobwebs in the valley, filaments that parted and drifted away at the touch of the sun, disclosing the magic work of the nocturnal frosts upon the foliage of the trees. It seemed to Leigh, looking from his eyrie, that Nature had never before painted a panorama of such wondrous beauty. Here a solitary elm in the meadow below the cliff, in the region which the collegians called "over the rock," stood forth all crimson against the green sward; further on, the woods began, masses of yellow and red maples, with scattered pines and oaks of more sombre hue, billowing gently upward toward the blue of the distant skyline.

It was now that the young astronomer began to take up once more the pursuit that had been so long interrupted. He felt that if he were to accomplish something, he must begin a series of observations with a definite end in view. There was also another motive than the desire of professional reputation — a wish to increase his worth in Miss Wycliffe's eyes by achievement. Her absence from town, though of only a few days' duration, freed him from the distraction which the very possibility of seeing her presented, and night after night he ascended to his watch-tower.

But he presently discovered that it was one thing to take observations on Mount Hamilton, where no other claims occupied part of his time, and quite another to watch by night and teach by day. The bishop was right in saying that his chief occupation must needs be the teaching of elementary mathematics to undergraduates. For any satisfactory results, prolonged observations must be made from twilight to dawn, and such periods of wakefulness were impossible when he must present himself before a class at nine o'clock in the morning. Not that this was necessary each day. His hours were irregular, but the morning classes were sufficiently numerous to break up the continuity of his observations, and to render their results unsure.

In this quandary, he ought, perhaps, to have abandoned his purpose and to have taken up some problem in pure mathematics, but here the perversity of human nature interposed. The forbidden, or at least difficult, road was the one he desired to travel, and he could not make up his mind to turn back, though he saw no prospect of going far. Instead, he began to make a few preliminary observations at random, and enjoyed the sight of the familiar constellations as one enjoys a return to old faces and associations. For the present he swept the skies leisurely, feasting on the infinite wonders which no consuetude could render commonplace. He longed for some unusual phenomenon in the sidereal tracts, a comet, or a temporary star, one of those strange wanderers that appear for a time, attain a brief and vivid maximum, and vanish into the darkness from which they have emerged. But only about a score of such objects had been credibly reported in historic times, and he searched the thoroughfare of the Milky Way, the region in which they were wont to appear, with small hope of reward.

One morning he received a letter from Miss Wycliffe, in which she named that night, if the skies were clear, for the observation she had mentioned at the dinner. He had almost forgotten the wish she then expressed in the greater importance she seemed to attach to her plan to help Emmet. Now he was surprised to discover that this matter, which had put him to such pains, had apparently slipped from her mind altogether. It gave him a conception of the multiplicity of her interests. It was as if she could not attend to all her charitable plans in person, but, having chosen a responsible agent, she dismissed the subject from her mind. Nor was he offended that she did not seem to consider the possibility of his having another engagement. On the contrary, the omission might imply her knowledge of the absolute unimportance to him of any claims compared with those she chose to make. Thus his love fed on crumbs invisible to her from whose table they had inadvertently fallen.

Had he been less infatuated, he might have divined in this omission one of those unconscious revelations of character — the selfishness of a spoiled and petted woman, who has come to assume that the convenience of others must necessarily coincide with her own. But Leigh saw only a hint of something confidential between them. He experienced also that peculiar intensity of interest which attends a lover's first glimpse of his mistress's handwriting. Even if it were commonplace, it would seem to him like no other in the world; but here there was really something distinctive. The letters were almost microscopically small, and crowded into the centre of the page with the effect of a decorative panel. He carried the epistle about with him all day, and observed the weather with solicitous attention, but no change occurred. The turquoise sky remained without a cloud. Fires from burning leaves sent up sluggish pillars of smoke, that spread out equilaterally above the trees in the windless air.

It so happened that he had the afternoon to himself. The prospect of inaction was intolerable, so he went down into the cool vaults below the Hall to take out his wheel for an afternoon of exploration. In these subterranean regions, perhaps more here than elsewhere, the imaginative appeal of the Hall was still present. As he prepared his wheel for the trip, which he meant should be a long one, he glanced up at the arched windows, down whose wide, slanting sills the sunlight poured in a flood of dusty gold. The walls of these foundations were five feet in thickness, built as if to keep out an invading host. Even in this unfrequented place, each stone was carefully cut, and fitted with exact nicety in its place. There was no rubble, no mere filling. Here was a lavishness of expenditure, a conscience in building, rare in modern times. Leigh looked down the long succession of massive archways, dwindling into the distance, with vague thoughts of the Castle of Chillon and the Man with the Iron Mask. When he ascended again into the warmth and sunlight of the open air, he had a passing sense of having emerged from a brief incarceration.

He pushed his bicycle through the maple walk to the brow of the hill from which he had first looked over the valley toward the west. There in the distance the village he had noted sparkled like a handful of white dice thrown carelessly down against the earth. He fixed upon this point as the terminus of his ride, and began to coast down the long slope, leaving a trail of grey dust to mark his flight.

There was a peculiar exhilaration in the dry heat of the October afternoon. Flocks of crows passed over his head with raucous cries. The cornstalks were stacked in serried array, like Indian wigwams, and heaps of apples, red and yellow and russet brown, lay ungathered in the orchards.

Through this rich and varied scene he sped swiftly, filled with all a Westerner's keen appreciation of a New England landscape, constantly contrasting the arid glories of deserts he had seen with the plenty about him. The farms of the fertile tracts of California were infinitely greater, the methods by which they were worked more modern, but about these smaller homesteads hung an atmosphere of history and romance. Leigh might champion the West in the presence of the bishop, but now, alone with his own thoughts, he paid tribute to the land in which the liberties of his country had been cradled. He seemed to have known it of old, though he now saw it for the first time. This experience was not a discovery, but a reacquaintance. From these old farmhouses, with their sagging rooftrees and windows filled with small panes, the minute men had issued with their muskets to repel the invader. At yonder sweep-well some English soldier had perhaps stopped in his dusty retreat for a drink of water, and had paid the penalty of his life for the delay. Above all, the fact that this was the native country of the woman he loved was ever present in his mind to add radiance to the afternoon.

At a point where the road took a sudden dip and curved in a wide sweep toward the southwest, his attention was arrested by an old house that lay nestled in the bend as in an encircling arm. The colour had once been red, but was now faded by many suns and washed thin by innumerable rains. A rampart of loose stones, overgrown with brambles and broken in places as if for the passage of cattle, enclosed the premises, and the typical well of the country lifted its curving pole in the front yard only a few feet from the roadway. Two women were seated on the worn stone slab in the opening that served for a gate, evidently basking in the afternoon sun and engaged in desultory chat. When Leigh dismounted from his wheel and asked for a drink of water, they moved slightly to let him pass, and he went up to the well to help himself. He lowered and raised the dripping bucket, not without awkwardness and a sense of pleasure in the unaccustomed task, as well as a memory of the poem which had immortalized that simple operation. It required only a casual glance about to see that this was a poultry farm. At the back of the house he saw a number of chicken runs, where a man was engaged in repair work. The air was filled with the comfortable clucking of hens, the most cheerful of country sounds. From his present slight elevation he had a view also of the trolley line which bisected the farm and crossed the road a few yards further on.

As he paused, before going on his way, to thank the women for their courtesy, he was struck, as he had not been at first, by the appearance of the younger. So delicate she seemed, so daintily dressed, that he wondered to find her in this rustic setting. In her lap she held a small basket of eggs, and he guessed correctly that she was a visitor, waiting for the next car to Warwick. He asked the distance to his destination, and from her appeal to the older woman he learned that they were mother and daughter. During these few moments he began to realise that she might well be called a beauty, though her pale, ethereal type was not one that made a personal appeal to him. Her whole figure was steept in sunshine, and as her lips parted in a smile, he noticed how the strong rays penetrated her cheeks, filling her mouth with a faint pink light and intensifying the whiteness of her teeth. Just so they penetrated the shells of the white eggs in her basket.

This picture remained with him for some time. The girl had appeared almost as fragile as the burden she carried, and suggested a train of thought concerning a certain type of New Englander whose strength is spent. It was such people, he reflected, who still clung to the old soil whence the sturdier representatives of the stock had long since departed, destined to give way at last to the swarming Polack, the French Canadian, and the Italian. The thought was melancholy, and coloured to no little extent the remainder of his ride. This incident, which was only one of several, was afterward revived to win a permanent place in his memory when he came to know the girl as Lena Harpster; for her part in the drama of the immediate future was destined to be connected strangely with his own.

Seven o'clock found him again upon the tower, setting the telescope in order and preparing for his guests. He could scarcely expect them for an hour, but he walked restlessly about the enclosure of the parapet, breathing gratefully the cool night air. The lamp within his cabin shone dimly through the small windows upon his promenade. Beyond the battlements to the east, the evening star, which the Roman poet called Noctifer, began to bicker and brighten in the serene sky, and the last vestige of the sun's afterglow had now faded from the west. It was already as dark as a summer midnight. Small and continuous sounds came floating up from the city beyond. Immediately below he heard the occasional voices of students passing on the stone walk, and from the meadows on the west came the melancholy hoot of an owl.

Accustomed though he had been to lonely vigils, he was impressed by the juxtaposition of the minute and the infinitely vast, of the transient and the eternal. He stood looking for some time at the track of the Milky Way, till his gaze plunged into one of those abysms of blackness where no star shines, and the ghastliness of the distance suggested flooded in upon him. This lost and shivering sensation, when the world itself seems to shrink away and send the watcher spinning into the void, is vouchsafed to the astronomer only at rare moments, and from it an escape is offered by exact and intricate calculations. Even figures that climb into the millions, incomprehensible as they may be, offer some consolation to microscopic man; but when this consolation is withdrawn, as it was withdrawn from Leigh for the moment, he stands, as it were, annihilated by immensity.

Lost in this mood, the voice of Emmet came to his ears with a shock, a mere succession of sounds with scarce a meaning.

"Hello, professor! Are you up here star-gazing? I saw the door open at the foot of the stairs, and followed my nose till I found you, though it's a wonder I did n't break it, for my matches gave out two flights below."

The incongruity of this interruption was almost as great as a shout of laughter at a funeral, and Leigh experienced a reaction akin to hilarity.

"I'm glad to see you," he returned, "for I had rather given you up till after the election."

"I just dropped in for a few minutes' chat," his visitor explained. "There's something doing later.

It's funny that I have n't been up to the Hall once in the last ten years, and now I've come twice in a week. When I was a kid, I used to hang around the edge of the campus, over there by the bishop's statue, and listen to the band on Commencement Day. Sometimes I used to crawl in under the fence to baseball games, too. St. George's put up a gilt-edged article of ball in those days."

"I remember hearing that they had a star year, when they beat everything in sight."

Emmet remembered the year in question, and the very names of the chief players, who were enshrined in his mind as only an athletic hero can be enshrined in the imagination of the normal boy. As he chatted on about his early impressions of the Hall, his listener became aware that he regarded their first interview as the doorway of a friendship into which he had now entered. A knowledge of this fact smote Leigh with some compunction, for he had been so much absorbed in his own ulterior purpose as to regard this man in the light of a means toward its accomplishment. Now Emmet stood before him again, having taken him at his word, innocent of his original position as a pawn in another's game. He was not one who deserved to be so regarded, and Leigh felt this, though a greater interest had hitherto interfered with his appreciation. There was an element of discovery in this second meeting that was not unwelcome. Emmet's implied acceptance of his friendship suddenly added a new interest to his life, and served to enrich for him the city of Warwick, which until now had appeared a somewhat nebulous place, where only one spot glowed with warmth and light.

"Come into my shanty here," he said heartily. "I want to show you something I think will interest you. Have you ever looked at the stars?"

"On the street corner, at ten cents a look," Emmet answered.

"Then this will be something of a revelation to you. Miss Wycliffe is going to bring up a party to-night to use the telescope, but it's early yet."

The other made no comment upon this statement, and the reason of his silence remained obscure; whether it were due to indifference, or to a fear of disclosing a cherished emotion. It seemed more likely that the latter was the true explanation, and Leigh already knew his visitor well enough to be prepared for sudden streaks of reticence or secretiveness. The fact that he had discouraged his previous advances on the subject of Miss Wycliffe was enough to explain this present silence, but he felt that Emmet was acutely conscious of her impending arrival. He could not help wondering also whether he would linger deliberately until she should come. Speculating thus, he sat down in the chair and trained the telescope upon Saturn.

"There," he said, rising. "What do you make of that?"

"I see a star," Emmet answered after a while, "with a ring of mist around it — two rings."

"There are four, at least," said Leigh; "but the inner and intermediate rings are dark. A better instrument would show a greenish hue. There are eight satellites besides. You can imagine what sort of moonlit nights they have in Saturn, supposing that any one lives there to enjoy them."

Emmet drew a deep breath of wonder, and it was evident that his unimaginative mind was struggling with new conceptions. There was a gleam of humour in his eyes which contrasted oddly with the suggestion of awe in his voice, as he looked up and answered: "It must be a great place for lovers, professor. And how far away might it be?"

"Let me see — something over eight hundred and eighty millions of miles from the sun. Its distance from us depends" —

"Never mind," Emmet put in. "A few million miles more or less don't bother me any. It makes things down here seem rather small, does n't it? Politics, for example."

"It has the effect of readjusting our perspective a little," Leigh admitted. "I wanted to show you that planet at this time, because it is now at its best. If you waited another seven or eight years, you would see it only as a ball, for the rings would then be edgewise to the plane of your vision. Twice in about thirty years the rings seem to disappear, and twice they fan out to their largest extent. You 'll never see them broader than now."

Without a word Emmet turned back to the telescope.

"You can imagine," Leigh continued, sure of his listener's interest, "how that change puzzled the earlier astronomers. They thought that Saturn was merely a central ball with two handles, like the handles of a soup tureen; and when Galileo watched them grow thinner and thinner and at last disappear, he wondered whether Saturn had devoured his own children, as he expressed it. It was n't until fifty years later that a Dutchman named Huygens discovered the real cause of the variation. You don't mind a few excerpts from my lectures? But wait a minute; let me show you something else."

It was long after eight o'clock, so imperceptibly did the time slip away, when they emerged from the cabin, and Emmet prepared to go. Leigh looked at his watch, and realised with a quickening of his pulses that the visit so eagerly anticipated must be imminent, that Miss Wycliffe might even now be coming up the stairs. What if she had come, and, failing to find him below to guide her, had gone away offended? At the thought, he rushed back into the cabin and lighted the lantern which he used for his transits up and down the tower. When he came out again, he found that Emmet, instead of going, had drifted over to the western parapet, where he stood looking through an embrasure, as if the later engagement of which he had spoken were his last concern.

"My other visitors will be coming soon," Leigh explained, "and I must go to light them up the stairs."

He thought of the probable composition of the party, and reflected that it would simplify the situation if Emmet should go before their arrival. But his visitor failed to accept his implied suggestion. Was he dazed by the immensities into which he had looked, or did he form a sullen resolve to remain and meet that society against which he had so bitterly inveighed? Leigh knew that he could count on Miss Wycliffe's friendliness and upon her tact in meeting a situation, but he guessed that, if her companions were of like mind with the bishop, his present guest might be made to feel that he was an intruder.

"Just look at that car over in the valley," Emmet called, without turning. "It crawls through the darkness like an illuminated centipede."

Leigh was struck by the comparison, and in spite of his impatience, he went over and glanced through another depression in the wall. At the moment of turning away he was arrested by the distant panting of a motor-car far down the boulevard that skirted the cliff. Instinctively he waited to see it pass, as one waits for the passing of a train. Turning his eyes in the direction of the sound, which ascended with startling distinctness through the night air, he presently saw a gleam shoot above the hill; and now the great touring-car came on at breakneck pace, searching the dusty highway a hundred yards in advance with a clean pencil-shaft of light.

He was far from suspecting that he was watching the arrival of his visitors. It was not among his anticipations that Miss Wycliffe might come swooping down upon the college in this fashion, and moreover the machine was speeding from a direction directly opposite to that in which she lived. In fact, it was headed for the city from the open country beyond. His astonishment was great, therefore, when the car came to a sudden stop at the base of the tower, and the occupants fairly tumbled out in a gale of merriment and talk. In the babel of sounds Miss Wycliffe's voice detached itself, by its peculiar quality rather than by its power, causing his heart to vibrate as a string trembles to the touch.

"Mr. Cobbens," she cried gaily, "I believe you were bent on breaking our necks!"

"I 'm for walking home," came a man's voice.

There were no students' rooms directly over them, but to the north and south windows were flung open and heads peered curiously forth.

"Hush!" said another of the party. "Don't wake up the children."

This sally was greeted with another burst of mirth, and then the star-gazers filed through a small postern door in the walled-up arch that was one day to be opened wide for the passage of a road. Leigh took up his lantern, only to find that in his haste he had unwittingly turned out the flame. A puff of wind extinguished his match, and he was obliged to reënter the cabin for shelter from the draught. Owing to this delay, he had scarcely begun to descend before he heard the voices of his guests growing louder in their progress from below.

About midway he saw them coming across the platform immediately below him, the bishop's daughter in the lead with a tall wax candle in her hand. As she ascended the stairs, the light of the candle gave her uplifted face the effect of a delicate cameo set in a frame of radiating gold. Her lips were parted, her breath came fast, and her eyes were wondrous in their dark brilliancy. Rarely beautiful as the picture was, Leigh received no impression of a "missioned spirit rising unawares," for as her wrap slipped down from her shoulders, she suggested rather that goddess who floated into the light one April day on the crest of a wave. Apparently she was in a most gracious mood, and not inclined to hold him to account. She did not wait to learn the reason of his detention above.

"Don't apologise, please," she panted, "for we got along capitally. Dr. Cardington gave me this candle, but declined to come with us. I thought he quite resented our intrusion, and was anxious to pass us up without delay." Then, turning to her companions with whimsical imperiousness, "Stand in a row, the whole class, till I introduce you to your new instructor."

The dimness of the light and Leigh's perturbation of mind at the thought of Emmet made his impression of the personnel of the party so vague that he might have passed most of them the following day without recognition. They had evidently dined well, and were finishing a gay evening with a flying visit to the college observatory. Only the personality of Cobbens was salient in the group, and would have been so even if Leigh's curiosity concerning the man had not been previously aroused.

"We're too frivolous for Cardington," he said, taking off his cap and mopping his brow. "I'm glad to meet you, sir. This is a spooky place, the ideal place for a man to hang himself in. I spent four years in the Hall and never came up here before. I knew and loved your predecessor, as all the fellows did. The old gentleman may not have been well up in astronomy,—I don't know anything about that,— but he was well up in the psychology of boys. He left a big place behind him, which we're not likely to see filled in a hurry."

During this address he continued to shake Leigh's hand with an apparent cordiality that contrasted strongly with his final innuendo, but now their hands fell apart with mutual repulsion. Leigh had been prejudiced against the lawyer beforehand, and his first remarks at their introduction contained a grisly jest and an implied slight. But these things only paved the way to the final cause of distrust — the fashion of the man himself. He was unprepossessing in every line. His thin, pale face widened rapidly, like a top, to a broad and shining pate, which looked not so much bald as half naked below its sparse covering of reddish hair. His eyes were glimmering and of an indeterminate colour. Yet his voice was not unattractive in its persuasive intonation, and his manner was friendly almost to the verge of effusiveness. Whatever might be his demerits from a physical point of view, he lacked the general air of inconsequence that characterised most of his companions. He conveyed unmistakably the assurance of a certain malign power. One felt that his normal method of locomotion was the mole's, but that sooner or later he would thrust his head above the soil at the top of the hill.

As they emerged upon the roof, they came face to face with Emmet.

"Hello!" Cobbens cried, as the two men shook hands. "Are you taking a course in astronomy too?"

"Yes," replied the other, "and I'm just about going."

Their mutual cordiality of manner, somewhat in excess of the requirements of conventional courtesy, struck Leigh with a sense of the ridiculous. He had not anticipated a scene, but he had looked for some coldness and restraint. The other visitors, with a curious glance in passing, spread out over the roof or entered the cabin, but the bishop's daughter remained behind. She shifted the candle to her left hand, and offered her right to her *protégé* with charming courtesy.

"Has Mr. Leigh been casting your horoscope?" she asked, smiling. "I hope he found your star in the ascendant."

Leigh did not wonder that Emmet appeared dazzled, or that his bold eyes were a shade less bold in their embarrassed admiration.

"Thank you, Miss Wycliffe — I think we shall win."

"I hope so," she returned, with a momentary sidelong look at Cobbens. The lawyer's eyes were upon her, and as Leigh caught their hungry glimmer, he remembered with a sharp contraction of the heart that he was a widower, and that sometimes the most hideous men possess a compelling fascination for women of great beauty.

"Oh, astrology is out of date," Cobbens broke in, with an easy chuckle. "Isn't it, professor?"

"Yes," Leigh retorted, "but I believe politics is not."

The laughter with which this remark was greeted indicated the real tension that underlay all this appearance of good feeling.

"Politics is never out of date," Emmet declared, with grim emphasis, "as we mean to show you soon."

"Politics is like poker," Cobbens commented sententiously. "Just now we 're raising the ante, but presently there'll be a show down, and may the best hand win."

"We ask nothing better," Emmet assured him, moving toward the stairs. "Good-night. I must be off."

"Wait a moment!" Miss Wycliffe called after him. "Here — take this candle to light your way, and may good luck go with it."

Emmet had already begun to descend the stairs when her voice arrested him. He turned as she approached, and because of his lower position her form hid him entirely from the view of the two men she had just left. Leigh saw the fur edge of her wrap standing out like a mist against the flaring light of the candle as she stooped to hand it down, and he thought she lingered longer than was absolutely necessary, as if to speak some parting words of encouragement. The impression that further words had passed between them was so disquieting, in view of his suspicion of Emmet's audacity, that he was fain to believe himself mistaken. It seemed that Cobbens also had lost nothing of this incident, for when she returned, he regarded her with as much disapproval as he dared to show.

"You 'll turn the poor beggar's head, Miss Wycliffe," he said. "It 's a mistaken kindness. His fall will be all the greater for your whim."

"Sometimes beggars get on horseback," she retorted coolly, "and then they keep on riding."

Leigh's knowledge of the lawyer's career enabled him to appreciate the sharpness of this remark, but Cobbens was more adroit than he could have thought possible in the face of such a taunt.

"Well, when that poor beggar tries to mount the political horse, he 'll get thrown so hard that he 'll never try it again."

Miss Wycliffe vouchsafed no reply, but turned toward the cabin, and they followed her in silence. During the subsequent session about the telescope, Leigh was not surprised to find that she domineered over her friends, or that they accepted her tyranny without question. In her self-appointed office of the instructor's assistant, she gave this one or that the chair, until the young astronomer thought it high time to protest.

"I insist upon your taking a look yourself," he said. "I have something of peculiar interest reserved for you." And he trained the instrument upon Castor, in the constellation of the Twins. She took the chair and looked for a tantalising length of time in silence, while with one hand she waved off the questions and impatience of the others. He bent over her, almost oblivious of their presence. "It 's a double star, you see. What do you think of it?"

"Beautiful!" she answered. "I wondered why I was seeing double. Tell us about it."

"They are two suns in one sphere, swinging on through space side by side. Two centuries of calculations have brought out the fact that it takes forty-four years for the light of Castor to reach us, and that a thousand years are consumed in one circuit of its orbit."

"I must admit," she said, looking up at him with a mysterious splendour in her eyes, in which there yet lurked a suspicion of humour, "that a thousand years gives me a shiver."

Up to this time the moral atmosphere of the room had by no means attained the level reached by Leigh and Emmet alone, not only because of the restless presence of Cobbens, which refused to harmonise with the idea of sublimity, but also because, in any such gathering, the tendency is downward toward the plane of the most frivolous and commonplace person present. The jest about the class, intermittently revived, had reduced the stars to pretty baubles or, at most, to the fairy lamps of fanciful verse, in spite of figures of distance that grew more and more stupendous. But now a sudden hush fell upon them; it might have been a tardy appreciation, or the mere emotional reaction from little talk. For the moment Leigh forgot that they were not alone, and almost unconsciously he spoke the thought that had flashed from her eyes to his: "A thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, seeing that it is past as a watch in the night."

The situation had grown suddenly and unexpectedly dramatic. It was as if a troupe of revellers had torn aside a curtain in their mad rush, and had come face to face with the silence and blackness of an abyss. Miss Wycliffe rose from the chair as if starting back from such a vision, and though her tone, when she spoke, was light, it was apparently so by design.

"If you insist upon quoting from the Burial Service, Mr. Leigh, I shall take it as a hint to go home at once."

"And it 's time we did," Cobbens put in. "We 're much obliged to you, sir. We 've had a charming time, and owe you a vote of thanks."

When Leigh had lighted them downstairs, he ascended once more to his cabin, tortured by an acute self-consciousness. The evening had been far from satisfactory; never had the difference between anticipation and realisation been more impressively illustrated. In his afternoon dreams he had not considered Miss Wycliffe's companions, except as shadows, and it was they who had disturbed what would otherwise have been a charmed atmosphere. His quotation would have been natural had he been alone with the woman he loved, but in that company it seemed inept and melodramatic, deserving the rebuke she so easily administered. In his humiliation he thought that he must have appeared extremely youthful in her eyes, one who could not conceal his emotions before the gaze of the curious and shallow. Could he have overheard the conversation which took place between Cobbens and Miss Wycliffe on their way home, his distress would have been in no way lightened.

The lawyer allowed the machine to run more slowly, that its jar and noise might not drown his voice.

"Your friend with the comet-coloured hair," he began, "will never fit into the life of St. George's Hall. I can see he has n't the true Hall traditions or spirit."

She was apparently more interested in his views than inclined to express her own. If she reflected at all upon the speaker's lack of that physical distinction which he selected in Leigh for the exercise of his wit, and if she derived some enjoyment from an understanding of his resentment, she kept it to herself.

"What makes you think so?" she asked serenely.

"What was he doing with that Tom Emmet up there?" he demanded, by way of answer. "In my day, the professors of the Hall were more select in the company they kept."

"Times have changed since then," she commented, "and the world has grown democratic."

He suspected her mood of mockery, but his intelligence could not hold his spleen in check.

"Yes," he went on malevolently, "I suppose it has; and soon we shall have a lot of muckers in the college instead of the gentlemen that used to go there in my day. So that's the prize poor old Renshaw drew from the Western grab-bag! It's too bad your father was away."

"Is n't it?" she assented. "But then, you know, he is here on a year's appointment, and perhaps he will leave in the spring."

"I can't understand," he resumed, "how he came to know Tom Emmet, of all men, in this short time, and how he happened to have him up there on the tower."

As she seemed unable to throw any light upon this mystery, he was left to grapple with it alone.

CHAPTER VIII

"WHAT MAKES HER IN THE WOOD SO LATE?"

THE City Hall in Warwick was a three-storied brick building of dignified Colonial style, built during Washington's first administration. The foundations had settled somewhat, as more than one crack, zigzagging upward from window to window, bore witness; and many an iron clamp had stained the walls, suggesting to the sentimental mind that the old building was weeping rusty tears over the degeneracy of the times. However, the Hall was only in the first stages of an old age that might be described as green, for the huge beams were sound to the core, and the figure of a Roman lady still stood firmly upon the cupola, extending with one chubby arm the impartial scales of Justice.

About a block to the south, and across the street, surrounded by rows of crumbling gravestones carved with quaint epitaphs and heads of ghastly cherubs, stood the First Church. Any stranger, carried hither in a magic trunk and asked to name that corner of the world in which he found himself, would have glanced but once at the four white pillars of the First Church and once at the venerable City Hall, before answering that he was in the heart of New England. No one could fail to identify the architecture of these two characteristic edifices, or of the shops whose roofs slanted toward the street; no one could mistake the speech and countenance of many a passer-by. Evidences of modernity, buildings that might have been anywhere else, were not lacking; but these huge piles of iron and stone served only to bring into sharper contrast the remnants of an earlier civilisation.

As one looked up and down the curving street, the thing that immediately attracted his attention was a succession of church steeples or cupolas that broke the roof-lines at almost regular intervals, and the fashion of these structures left no doubt in the mind that Warwick, in spite of foreign immigration, was still a stronghold of Puritanism. All suggestion of Romish or Episcopalian tradition was scrupulously avoided, even to the omission of the cross and the substitution of a weather-vane or gamecock. Only one church told a different story. At some distance north of the City Hall a gothic edifice in brown stone, with a beautiful square tower of elaborate design, gave a touch of colour and richness to a vista otherwise somewhat cold and bare. This was St. George's Church, whose vestry, in the days when it required some degree of heroism to be an Episcopalian in that uncongenial atmosphere, had founded St. George's Hall. The present edifice, though numbering seventy-five years of life, was young compared with the First Church; and the lapse of time had not served to alter their respective positions in the community. In Warwick the Episcopalians were still a small minority; they were still the dissenters of this dissenting commonwealth.

Around the City Hall, which a pious care had preserved in spite of its present inadequacy, circled an almost unbroken procession of trolley-cars; for this point was the very centre of the web of tracks whose various termini were pegged out here and there in the neighbouring towns. It might be added that this spot was enshrined in the heart of every loyal citizen of Warwick as the true umbilicus of the visible universe.

In the eyes of Llewellyn Leigh, however, the place had no such mystic significance. On the afternoon following the visit of Miss Wycliffe to the tower, he had walked hither from the college, down the long, winding street on whose well-worn pavements the yellowing leaves of the elms threw a sheen like gold. He had noted many a colonial house built close to the sidewalk in the original New England fashion; he had seen glimpses of deep back gardens; but his appreciative attitude of the previous afternoon was gone, giving way to mild melancholy, such a mood as is sometimes induced by the perusal of an old romance dear to the youth of one's grandparents. The experience of the previous night had some hand in this disillusion. Some of the dissatisfaction with which it had left him still hung about his spirit, and drove him on in a vague search for diversion. He stood in front of the City Hall and watched the open cars go by, then took one, almost at random, that bore the label of Evergreen Park. As soon as he had swung himself aboard, he found that he was sitting beside Emmet, and the meeting was not altogether welcome in his present self-absorption. Emmet also seemed somewhat subdued as he asked him his destination, but he suspected that this impression might be merely a reflection of himself.

"I'm going wherever this car goes," he answered. "Evergreen Park, is n't it? I'm gradually exploring the surrounding country, and one direction will do as well as another. But where are you bound for?"

"Politics," Emmet said briefly. Whether he had left the tower the previous evening with a sore heart and was inclined to identify his new friend with his old enemy, or whether he was merely occupied with his own thoughts, Leigh now felt that his manner really exhibited some constraint. He was a man of keen intuitions, and divined a sensitiveness on his companion's part in regard to the rather inglorious figure he had cut, in spite of Miss Wycliffe's openly expressed interest. After all, might not this interest of hers savour of ostentatious patronage? At this thought he experienced a kind of fellow-feeling for the candidate, a change of emotion which his manner was quick to register. His interest in politics was the academic interest of the typical Mugwump he had confessed himself to be, and too much confined to an occasional vote of protest. He had never attended a primary meeting in his life, always having been too busy with his own career to realise this duty, and too nomadic in his habits to acquire a personal interest in local affairs. To him politics was the pastime of the rich, who could afford it, or the business of the poor, who used it as a means of support. The very word, as Emmet used it, conveyed an impression to his mind like that which Borrow received when his gipsy friends mentioned the mysterious "business of Egypt." He made a comment that drew his companion on to speak of Cobbens with his former bitterness, though in a smothered tone, as if he feared some chance listener in the car that was now filling rapidly.

"But you 'll find nothing doing in the park," Emmet said presently, with an abrupt change of subject. "The season has just closed, and there is n't a person on the place."

"So much the better," Leigh answered. "I 'm not in the mood for merry-go-rounds and picnickers."

The seat became crowded to the point of discomfort, and Emmet, with a significant look, went back to join the conductor on the platform. Leigh interpreted the look to mean that some of the political business on which he was bent lay with this man, and their earnest conversation confirmed his impression. Left alone, he took Emmet's place at the end of the seat and began to watch the passing scene. The car swung down a steep street and crossed a long bridge over the river, from which he had a view of a wide blue basin, where a score of little yachts lay motionless as floating gulls. In the other direction several sand-bars showed brown, ribbed backs, sparsely covered with coarse grass, and Leigh wished that he could find himself dropped upon one of them, that he might have the pleasure of wading ashore. The fancy put him in a better frame of mind, and the afternoon began to brighten. In front of him the open country beckoned, and before committing himself to it, he turned for a farewell look at Warwick. The city stood upon the high river wall, roof above roof shimmering in the hazy light, every line of chimney, spire, and tower softened by the distance, like a blurred etching against a pale blue background.

The country was similar to that through which he had passed the day before, only now the quality of the air was a little more drowsy, the quietude more absolute, and he awoke to the fact that the Indian Summer had begun. The car had gone about four miles before Emmet returned, and so absorbed had Leigh become that his reappearance was a surprise. They were now at the top of a long hill, from the summit of which the country fell away till it rose again far off in dark purple ridges of low mountains.

"I am reminded of California by that sky-line," Leigh remarked. "Only out there you see no patches of gorgeous foliage like those yonder. The autumn comes on by imperceptible gradations. The first thing you know, the leaves have shrivelled and gone."

"The park lies down there in the valley," Emmet said, on whom the comparison had evidently made no impression. "There 's nothing to see, though, at this time of year. Why don't you go on to Pitkinton and visit the silk mills?"

"Because I 'm determined to explore the park," Leigh answered. He was not one to be swerved from his purpose by another's persistence; in fact, any effort in such a direction usually had an opposite effect. "I have no desire to see a lot of men working over machinery to-day who ought to be out enjoying the Indian Summer," he explained. "I 'll reserve the mills for some other time."

The car came to a stop at a switch before a rustic gate, and they got off together. It occurred to Leigh that possibly he had been a little short with Emmet, somewhat unsympathetic with his practical and industrial interests. If this were so, it was merely because he realised the uselessness of explaining the peculiar intoxication of his mood, for he suspected that the other would regard such emotions as fit only for women and poets. "You might come for a walk with me," he suggested. "The exercise would do you good."

Emmet hesitated, as if he considered the proposition seriously, looking down the track at the approaching car for which their own was waiting. "No," he said slowly. "I must be getting back to town, and there 's one of the boys on this car that I want to see."

"Some other time, then," said Leigh. "There are n't any bandits in these woods, are there?"

"You 'd better keep your gun handy," Emmet answered. "Well, take care of yourself."

Leigh had by this time reached the wicket gate, where he turned a moment to catch Emmet's friendly wave of the hand. A few steps more, and the woods enclosed him like a wall. He heard the diminishing buzz of the returning car with a sense of relief and escape, for he was pleased that his invitation had not been accepted. In his mind lingered a feeling that he and Emmet had not been able to meet this afternoon quite as before, but the feeling vanished with the disappearance of the car, leaving him merely glad of the solitude. Soon he came to a spring, a placid basin of water canopied by an artificial grotto of rock, and kneeling down he gazed intently at his own reflection. But no thought of Narcissus, or of Horace's fountain of Bandusia, intervened to substitute literary memories for the reality of sensation;

he was too genuine a lover of nature to interpret it in the terms of letters.

Down at the bottom of the pool the water welled up in slow puffs, as if the ground were panting, stirring dead sticks and withered leaves, and presently, in the spokes of light that radiated from the reflection of his head, he descried a frog resting motionless below him. He disturbed the water, so transparent that he could not tell when his fingers would enter it, and the frog was gone like a grey streak, leaving little swirls like dust where its feet had touched the bottom in its flight. The only thought that floated through his mind as he knelt there was one concerning the infinitely small in nature. The place, he knew, was swarming with unseen life, creatures compared with which the frog was a devouring monster of colossal proportions; and he reflected that the immeasurable spaces of the sky were not more wonderful than they.

Having taken a deep drink, he continued on his way, noting that here beneath the trees the afternoon seemed several hours advanced beyond the time of the sunny open, for the shadows were like twilight. Below the path, crossed and recrossed by rustic bridges, ran a small rivulet. The gurgling of its miniature falls, like the sound of water coming from the neck of a jug, the occasional cawing of a crow, and the snapping of twigs beneath his feet were the only interruptions to the silence. Here was a sudden hushed restfulness, as grateful as the draught of water he had drunk at the spring.

The rivulet ended in a broader stream, on whose bank he found a long, low boat-house already locked and abandoned. A wooden bridge ran across to the opposite shore, where a large dancing-pavilion stood, waiting for the snow to follow the drifting leaves through the open windows. A path which skirted this larger stream to the left promised more seclusion than the way across the bridge and decided his choice. On the bosom of the water were scattered the wrecks of what had recently been a beautiful bed of Egyptian lotos. Here, where all had been glistening greenness with splashes of yellow blossoms, attenuated stalks lifted what looked like crumpled fragments of brown paper, which quivered in a breeze too light to move the surface of the stream. Here alone the fingers of the frost had left a blight, like that of flames, and had denied to their destructive work the glamour of a funeral pall, dealing death without pomp or circumstance.

The trees crept down and almost thrust him at times into the water which lay at his feet, black from the vegetation in its bed and reflecting on its brimming surface bright patches of colour from the foliage on the opposite shore. Here and there a stricken tree was duplicated by a long white image that seemed to point like a finger to the depths below. Apparently there was no current, and this lack of motion, combined with the blackness of the water and the sombreness of the woods, produced an effect in striking contrast with the blue and sunny river he had first crossed, its floating boats and scattered sand-bars.

At length the trail took a sudden turn into the woods. The oaks and elms gave way to a grove of pines, and the tangled jungle of undergrowth was replaced by a slippery carpet of brown needles. The path climbed upward until it ended in a comparatively open space, and there, under the branches of a pine, her white hands clasped upon her knees, he saw a woman sitting alone. If a hamadryad had suddenly thrust her head around the bole of a tree and looked him full in the face, he would not have been more astonished, so absolute was his sense of utter loneliness; but when he saw that the figure was that of Miss Wycliffe, he stood like one transfixed and deprived of the power of speech. This was like a wild freak of his fancy, and he could scarcely believe the vision real. The surprise appeared to be entirely on his side, for she smiled as if the meeting were a matter of course, or one of appointment. Undoubtedly she had been listening to his approach for some time, and had seen him first.

“Well, Mr. Leigh,” she called, “I hope I did n’t frighten you. You started as if you had seen a ghost.”

He came forward, laughing. "So you are one of the bandits Emmet told me of! He said the woods were full of them."

"Emmet," she repeated. "Did you come out with him? I did n't know he was on this line."

"He is n't on any line at present. He has thrown up his job entirely for politics. That seemed to be what he came out for. I left him on the platform waiting for the down car, which he said was run by 'one of the boys' whom he wanted to see." After a slight hesitation he added: "I tried to persuade him to come with me, but I 'm glad now he did n't."

The frank friendliness of her gaze betrayed no acceptance of his meaning. "And how did our experiment come out?" she asked. "I inferred from his presence with you last night that you had struck up some sort of a friendship. I thought you would." She motioned him to be seated with her characteristic suggestion of imperiousness. "Sit down, do, and tell me all about it. You 've come just in time for my little picnic, though I 'm afraid the friend I expected has failed me. You 'll get nothing to eat, however, but this basket of Concord grapes which I picked up on the way." And she thrust it forward with a smile of invitation.

He threw himself down at her feet, and having selected a cluster of the purple fruit, he held it up admiringly to the light.

"I did n't see any one on the car except the usual suburbanites," he remarked. "But would n't you be afraid out here all alone, with no men to protect you?" He wondered who the friend might be, but was too much pleased with his own good fortune to give it more than a passing thought.

"I believe we ought to be," she confessed, "but we 're not. The truth is, we like to get far away from civilisation and exchange confidences. Warwick is a great whispering-gallery, full of tale-bearing bats that peep and mutter."

He lifted his head and listened. "Did you get that faint lift of the breeze in the pines just then? Now it 's gone; but it was just like the distant sound of the surf. If my eyes were shut, I should think myself by the shore."

"Oh, I 've been listening to nothing else for the last half hour," she returned, "and I much prefer the sound of a human voice. Too much of nature frightens me. You see I have no soul."

"You 've too much soul, perhaps," he amended. "If you had less, you would be impervious to such suggestions. But I know what you mean. However, we were talking about our friend Emmet, and your description of Warwick reminded me of his animadversions on the place. But let me go back to the beginning for a fair start, and tell you how I managed to get hold of him." He described the events of the morning following the dinner and the visit Emmet had paid him in the evening, putting in the personal detail with an instinctive knowledge of a woman's demand for such things. Her evident appreciation rewarded him. She had something to say of the captain who had helped him in his effort, and at many a point in their talk the congeniality of their minds became evident. "You know how Emmet feels about the college, and about colleges in general?" he asked.

She nodded understandingly.

"Unfortunately," he continued, "St. George's Hall is personified for him in Anthony Cobbens. He told me all about their early associations and subsequent estrangement. I must say that after his arraignment of the man, I half expected to see them fly at each other's throats, whereas they almost embraced." He threw back his head and laughed heartily at the remembrance.

"The amenities of civilisation — and politics," she murmured, smiling.

"But how roiled poor Emmet was underneath," he mused. "I wish I had Cardington's gift of speech to express the thoughts that have lately been taking shape in my mind concerning the spectacle of a democratic aristocracy. Now, if Emmet had the philosophical attitude of mind, he would n't have the strength to struggle which he undoubtedly does have. He needs that stimulus of personal animosity to get somewhere; if he were philosophical, he would be unambitious. When he has arrived, as they say, he will come to see that an aristocracy in the usual worldly sense of the term must have money to maintain its existence. The old aristocracy must have accessions of vulgar blood and vulgar money to keep it alive, just as the language must be rejuvenated from time to time by slang from the streets. I made a tentative effort to present some such point of view to him as you suggested, but it did n't take. He could only see Cobbens's red head in front of his eyes, and it was like the proverbial rag of the same colour to the bull. Emmet is a generation short of being able to see in his personal enemy a synopsis of the processes of history. This, in short, is my conclusion. I 'm afraid I did n't accomplish what we hoped for."

"I might have known it," she commented. "But I 'm grateful to you for making the attempt."

"What hypocrites we are!" he cried, sitting up. "A little of my own philosophy would n't be a bad thing for home use. I could easily allow myself to get into as great a rage against Warwick as Emmet himself. Already I 've begun to call it hard names, such as deadly, and cold, and snobbish. I 'm beginning to see that a man like myself must always be on the outside here. I ought to have begun to live in Warwick three generations ago, or to have brought a fortune with me. In the West men are estimated on their individual merits, and one is n't made to feel himself an outsider."

"Perhaps because there's no inside to get into," she suggested coolly.

He had a vision of that sanctum into which Cobbens could buy his way with his wife's money, and he realised that this was not the first glimpse he had had of a quality in the woman he loved that was not all sweetness.

"I feel like one who has interfered in a family quarrel," he returned, good-naturedly. "Well, I may be only a transient here, a bird of passage nesting for a year in the towers of the Hall. I will earnestly request myself to be amused at the spectacle of a democratic aristocracy." He felt that in her heart she agreed with him; else, why did she favour Emmet's candidacy?

"That will be like the attempt to extract sunbeams from cucumbers," she replied, with a note of weariness in her voice. "But the equanimity with which you took my speech about the West makes me feel like a horrid shrew. Have you really got a sweet disposition, Mr. Leigh, or are you just putting on airs?"

"Perhaps I have some occult reason for wishing to win your good opinion," he suggested.

For the second time she staved off a personal drift in the conversation. "It's getting darker," she said, looking about with sudden concern.

"Don't say you must be going, Miss Wycliffe," he begged. "This is the very best part of the day.

Let me light a fire of pine cones." He started up and stood before her, anticipating her acquiescence. She nodded her approval graciously, and at that moment the setting sun, struggling through the trees, shone full across her face and illumined her eyes. In this clear glow they were no longer black, but brown as the brown velvet of her jacket. He was haunted by a sense of a duplicated experience, and then remembered the fragile girl sitting on the stone step with her basket of eggs in her lap. But Miss Wycliffe's colouring was glorified, rather than penetrated, by the sun's rays, enriched rather than absorbed. Her face, framed in a large hat faced underneath with a delicate tint of blue chiffon, seemed to look out at him as from an inverted sea-shell, and the picture arrested him on the point of going. As if she suspected the cause of his delay and intended to break the charm, she removed the hat deftly and placed it with her gloves beside her.

"I think a fire would be pleasant," she remarked, "though it is really as warm as summer."

She had changed the picture only to improve it, for the suggestion of wildness and freedom in her dark hair fitted more perfectly with the spirit of the twilight woods. It may be that only a man can understand the fascination that exists for men in just such a simple operation as she had performed. The absolute femininity of it, the fumbling for the hatpins, the deliberate and thoughtful reinserting of them afterward in the discarded hat, where they can be found when needed, the invariable smoothing back of the hair from brow and eyes, — all these things make their peculiar appeal. It was this that caused Leigh to smile as he turned away and went in search of fuel, whistling softly to himself. Returning with his hat well filled with pine cones, he caught sight of her face before she noted his approach, and was struck, as once before, by her expression of immeasurable sadness. She sat, as at first, embracing her knees with her hands, her nether lip drawn in as if she would suppress a sigh, her eyes fixed upon the distance and shadowed by something of the solemnity of the coming night.

As the light flames shot suddenly up from the heap of cones, their brilliancy made the surrounding woods seem vast and dark, the more so as the sun had now sunk behind the hill across the stream, filling the woods in that quarter with a glow as from another fire. He fed the flames thoughtfully with bits of broken branches, talking somewhat at random about a camping trip in the Yosemite.

"Is n't it absurd," she said presently, "that we have gradually lowered our voices till we are talking almost in whispers?"

"I mean to break the spell at once," he declared, and having made a trumpet with his hand, he hallooed loudly toward the west. The result was unexpected.

A ghostly triple echo, which the lower tone of their earlier conversation had failed to elicit, answered him from the opposite shore. In broad daylight an echo will suggest mystery and a bodiless, impish mocker, even to an unimaginative mind, but now the effect was intensified tenfold by the silence and darkness that enclosed them like a wall.

"You may laugh," she said, "but I don't wonder that primitive peoples imagined a haunted nature. I'm an absolute Pagan this very moment. I believe in Pan and Echo and all the rest of them, and I don't like their company a bit."

"Have you noticed how silent it has grown all of a sudden?" he asked. "It seems only a few minutes ago that we heard the crows cawing in the branches, and the woods were full of small noises of squirrels and birds."

She leaned forward and prodded the fire absently with a stick, gazing into the flames as if fascinated. Presently a whiff of smoke unlike that from the burning faggots reached her, and she looked up to see that he had lighted his pipe.

"I don't mind your smoking," she commented, smiling, "but if that's a sign that you have settled down for half an hour of solid comfort, I must interpose. You can smoke as we go along."

"It's only half-past five," he said regretfully, holding up his watch to the light.

Her reply was forestalled by a sound, slight in itself, and one that would have passed unnoted an hour before, the sharp snapping of a twig somewhere in the darkness behind her. Only when he saw her start, and the widening of her dark eyes, did he realise how much truth had been contained in her jesting confessions of a few moments since. He could see that she was more than startled, that her emotion was one of fright.

"Why, it's nothing," he said reassuringly, rising to his feet. "Any little noise sounds loud in the woods at night. It was only a squirrel, or a decayed branch giving way. I'll prove it to you." He raised his voice and called: "Hello, there!" The result was vaguely disconcerting. "I forgot our friend Echo," he said apologetically. With some idea of restoring her composure by his own unconcern, he began to move in the direction from which the sound had come; but he had taken only a few steps when a blot of darkness which had crouched before him like a huge stone or the stump of a tree suddenly detached itself and rose into the form of a man. Leigh had an indistinct vision of a face, of arms that seemed to ward him off, and then the intruder fled without a word, breaking through the woods like a frightened animal. He stumbled back to the fire, and stood listening till the sounds of flight had died away.

"Well," he declared, "that was a surprise! A mutual one too, it seems. I don't know which of us was frightened the most, but we got away from each other as fast as we could."

"Oh, I knew it!" she cried, beginning to fasten on her hat with trembling fingers. "I had felt for some time that we were not alone."

"It was only the keeper," he assured her, "or some tramp, attracted by the firelight and thinking he had stumbled upon the camp of one of his pals. Let's leave him the rest of the grapes, to show that we bear him no ill-will for the shock he has given us. I'll just scrape a ring about the fire to keep it from spreading."

"This is my last picnic," she declared, "for this year at least. I couldn't come here again after that fright."

"Perhaps it's just as well I happened along," he remarked. "That fellow may have been lurking about the woods all the afternoon, hoping to pick up something from late visitors like ourselves."

A moment later he regretted his ill-considered words, for at the thought of the peril she might have been in, she rose to her feet with an evident return of her panic. Without waiting to put on her gloves, she thrust them into his hands with an impulsive movement, almost childlike in its unconscious betrayal of emotion. He put the gloves in his pocket and took her hand to lead her down the slope. "It's slippery here," he explained. But there was no need to apologize for what she by no means considered a liberty. Indeed, though he was conscious of nothing so much as of her hand in his, he was aware that she felt in his own merely a needed support. As she leaned upon him in the descent, he divined that her fear increased, instead of diminishing, with their progress into the circumjacent darkness, as if the act of flight intensified an appreciation of the original cause. He strove to dispel the emotion his own words had done so much to arouse, not without a guilty self-congratulation that his thoughtlessness had driven her to his protection. Feeling his way thus, step by step, he presently saw before his feet, as in a dream, the dim reflection of a star; and then the stream grew upon his vision, like a strip of fallen sky.

At that moment her foot slipped on the smooth pine needles, and with a smothered cry she seemed almost to swoon into his arms at the very margin of the water. Instinctively he held her close, her heart beating wildly against his own. A fragrance sweeter than the fragrance of the woods pervaded his senses, and he felt her hair brush against his cheek. Then she stood released, having recovered herself with a swift impulse, like a wild creature that had felt in time the first touch of the snare. This elusiveness, this sudden recoil from his contact, sobered him. What he might have done, had she remained a moment longer in his arms, must be forever a matter of conjecture with him now; but the intoxication vanished like a vapor from his mind, leaving a keen vision of the situation in its uncoloured reality. There arose within him a certain sense of shame that he had given so much and received, as yet, nothing in kind. He had passed that period of youth when a stolen kiss seems the acme of love's adventure. Such a theft on his part, irrespective of its consequences, would have left him still unsatisfied.

The belt of sky above the stream was sown thick with stars, that were beginning to make themselves felt more clearly each moment as the turning world gradually plunged this part of its surface into deeper shadow. In this wan light the pathway lay dimly discernible before them. The condition of the atmosphere was such as is best described by the word *sublustris*, that glimmering radiance which lies somewhere between thick darkness and such a light as is thrown by the crescent moon. It was no longer necessary that he should guide her as before, and as soon as she had freed herself from his embrace, she began to take the lead.

"What a coward you must think me!" she said, with a ghostly little laugh. "Even now I would n't dare go last. As it is, I can see ahead and know that you are behind me."

Her confidence in his protecting power brought him scant consolation. A spirit of dreariness seemed to rise up from the faint reflections that floated on the stagnant water; it blew stealthily out of the encroaching woods, and was voiced in the stuttering, tentative note of an awakened owl. Familiarity with nature had freed him from that sense of pursuit in the woods at night which oppresses even a stout heart unaccustomed to loneliness, and the flight of the unexpected apparition was sufficient proof that he had no desire to molest them. The incident certainly offered no ground for continued uneasiness, he reflected. Why, then, did she make so much of it? Why indeed, except that her companion was not the one man in all the world with whom she would choose to be there alone. The time and the place were full of romantic suggestions, were the loved one present. That he was not present was indicated only too clearly by the unconscious confession of her next remark: "I would n't have believed two hours ago that this path could seem so long!"

They reached the boat-house at last, but instead of turning up the ravine which he had followed from the spring, she ascended a flight of stairs and came out upon an open road. From this point their way was straight and plain. On their right lay the woods from which they had emerged, and on their left was an unobstructed field. In this free space the heavens seemed to expand immeasurably, and both felt the influence of the change. She began to make light of her former alarm, and his mood became more hopeful. He told himself that he had nourished impossible expectations, considering their short acquaintance, and that the remnant of their time together could be better employed than by indulging alone his wounded pride. As they walked up and down the platform, waiting for the car, the frogs from a near-by pool trilled intermittently, and they paused to listen.

"They seem to be congratulating themselves upon the prolongation of the summer season," he remarked. "Miss Wycliffe, have you any peculiar associations with that sound?"

"Dinners," she returned flippantly. "Heavens! I've had enough of nature for one evening. How perfectly melancholy! But what do they remind you of?"

"I'm in a reminiscent mood," he confessed. "I can never hear the frogs trilling in the night without being reminded of the marshlands around my native town in the Middle West. Every night, all summer long, I could hear that symphony through the open windows of my room, and because I was then in the adventurous and romantic period of youth, the recurrence of the sound brings back an echo of old emotions. I feel as if I were being called upon to go out into the world and seek my fortune."

"Have you been back there lately?" she asked. "How does it seem to revisit the home of your childhood after having had adventures, and after having done something in the world? I've never had any home but this, I 've never travelled except for pleasure, and I 've never accomplished anything."

Leigh lifted his head and laughed, but the laugh was not altogether a happy one. "You present me to myself in a new light," he answered. "So far I have only accomplished the feat of reaching the first rung of the ladder which I used to think I would have climbed by this time. But yes, I have been back there recently, and found everything changed. In fact, the West is a symbol of mutation. The marshlands have been filled in; streets extend across the places where I used to go for cat-tails; they have no more batrachian concerts there now. The only reminder of that earlier characteristic of the place is a huge green frog worked out in a marble mosaic on the floor of the new court house. That is the seal of my native town."

By mere accident Leigh had made that first important step in love's progress; he had succeeded in arousing a personal interest.

"It 's quite charming," she commented, "and not lacking in an element of poetry, either."

"Poetry," he echoed, inspired by her appreciation. "It 's just those apparently common things that are so full of it, but the poets don't see it, or else they don't quite dare to give it expression. The conventions of the art are too overpowering. Take the railroad train, for example, which stands to most of us for convenience combined with a certain measure of discomfort. There 's nothing more stimulating to the imagination than the whistle of a locomotive in the distance at night, though perhaps only the poor, to whom travel is a luxury, appreciate to the full its invitation and the suggestion of adventure. Working up from one stratum to another through difficulties, they are attended by a growing wonder as the world expands before them. But to have all experiences open to you from the first by the power of wealth, such as travel and theatres, for example, is the real misfortune of birth. The curiosity of the rich is gratified before it is stimulated by denial. Then what is left to them?"

"Ennui," she answered simply.

"What a blessing it is, then," he went on, "to have no time for that emotion, or rather, lack of emotion. I believe that if I had been born rich, I should have been ruined long before this; but I set myself a long road to travel, a road that reaches, in fact" — he made a wide upward gesture — "to the stars."

"Now what is it," he continued, after a pause, "that makes Warwick so uninspiring, in spite of its obvious charm? Is n't it the spiritual stagnation that comes with wealth and aristocracy? One reads it in the very faces of the people, and recognises it in the things they think worth while. It does n't need a long observation to discover this. A stranger takes in the impression with his first breath here. Like the first glance at a new face, it reveals the truth. Afterward you get accustomed to an unprepossessing face, and forget what you first thought of it. In much the same way, I suppose, a man could become hypnotised and drugged by the atmosphere of Warwick. All this is in the nature of an explanation of what I meant this afternoon by my denunciation of the place."

She stood silently looking down into the pool from which arose the sound that had brought them to this point. It was evident that she felt no temptation now to indulge in one of those retorts that came so easily to her tongue. Leigh had appealed to her imagination, a thing which the modern man more rarely succeeds in doing with a woman than his predecessor who wore gay garments and rode a caparisoned steed in the lists. Besides, his earnestness had given his thought, though it was by no means a new one, his own personal stamp, and won its acceptance. Deeper than these causes, he had expressed her own convictions.

"A denunciation," he continued shrewdly, "with which you sympathised."

"One must do something," she said, with a little gesture of despair, "or die of suffocation."

"Exactly," he agreed, "even if it be only to take the side of the under dog in a municipal election. Can you wonder that your sympathy with Emmet, your evident revolt against the point of view of your own class, set me to speculating upon the reason? Have I worked out the problem to its demonstration?"

Her silence seemed to give assent to his question, though she was apparently so deeply plunged in thought that she forgot to reply in words; and the appearance of the headlight of the trolley-car down the track brought their conversation to a close. Miss Wycliffe herself suggested that they take the front seat beside the motorman, explaining that she always enjoyed the unobstructed view ahead. He handed her up, pleased to think that they were still to be for some time practically alone. At their backs a glass partition shut off the rest of the car; the motorman himself seemed a mere automaton, with ears for nothing but the bell, and eyes for nothing but the gleaming track ahead. Leigh suspected that a wish to avoid a possible recognition from some passenger had influenced her in taking this seat, and he dared to hope also that she shared his appreciation of the further opportunity to be alone together. Their conversation, however, was fragmentary, as if each were deep in incommunicable thoughts. From time to time, as the car swung swiftly around a curve, she swayed against him softly, so that he began to look expectantly ahead for a change in the straight line of the track, laughing happily to himself at her involuntary apology.

Their comradeship seemed to have entered upon a stage in which mere propinquity was sufficient to give content without the aid of conversation, and a deep serenity of mood had now replaced the wavering uncertainties of his earlier emotions. This atmosphere of harmony and understanding remained unbroken until they stood before her house; but now an inexplicable change occurred. She suddenly held out her hand with a gesture that seemed to him frankly impatient, as if she were anxious to be gone. "And my gloves," she said. "I think I gave them to you."

He produced them reluctantly. "I had hoped you would forget them, Miss Wycliffe."

"One does n't easily forget a new pair of gloves," she answered in a tone cruelly matter-of-fact, as if she would show deliberately her unconcern. He could now see all too clearly what a fool's dream he had cherished, and the awakening was painfully abrupt. He divined that something was amiss, something of which he had no knowledge or right to a knowledge. During that afternoon he had passed through the whole gamut of a lover's emotions, only to strike at last the lowest note of all, and he watched her hurrying up the walk as if she were going out of his life forever.

That evening he turned over in his mind all the phases of their enigmatical relationship, cursing his bland folly as he recalled with keen humiliation his complacent explanation of her to herself while they waited for the car. Her manner at parting appeared nothing less than a decisive rebuke. When at length he fell asleep, he was visited by a ghastly dream, in which the incident in the woods was reenacted with all the grewsome accentuation that belongs to the realm of dreamland. Again the shadowy figure rose up before his feet and fled away. He pursued and grappled with the intruder in the darkness, demanding his name and trying to see his face. Finally he seemed to prevail, but the figure slipped from his grasp and left him there alone. He turned back then, seeking the fire and smitten with poignant anxiety for the woman he loved; but the light was quenched, and the place could not be found. After struggling for what seemed a lifetime through mazes of darkness and terror, he awoke.

CHAPTER IX

"HER HEART WAS OTHERWHERE"

A FEW nights after the meeting in the woods, Leigh was hurrying along Birdseye Avenue, like the belated White Rabbit on its way to the Queen's croquet party. He was going to a lecture on Velasquez at the house of one of his colleagues, Professor Littleford. The beginning of the lecture was set for eight o'clock, and it was now past the hour, for he had been detained in the city by the joint debate between Emmet and Judge Swigart, put at half past five that the workingmen might have an opportunity to attend.

The time consumed in returning to the Hall, in dining and dressing, almost convinced him of the advisability of staying at home, but he reflected that to do so was probably to miss a chance of seeing Miss Wycliffe, and this was a risk he was by no means disposed to run. He was possessed by a desire to see her again and to test the permanency of her last mood with him, when she had demanded her gloves and left him in despair. If she were inclined to repentance, he felt that he would know it, even if he managed to meet her for only a moment in the midst of the crowd. But it chanced that fate was kinder to him than he had dared to hope.

As he had anticipated, he was one of the last arrivals, but he was not destined to experience the embarrassment he feared from this circumstance. The wide hallway of the great house was deserted, and he threaded his way through several dimly lighted drawing-rooms in the direction of a voice that indicated the location of the lecturer. Not until he stood in the doorway of what appeared to be an assembly hall, and was in reality the ballroom of the house, did he realise the reason of the obscurity through which he had passed. At the far end of the room, he saw one of the well-known portraits of Philip IV projected by a lantern upon a huge sheet of canvas. The widening shaft of light that traversed the intervening space dimly disclosed the audience as a series of heads, from which arose a sibilant wave of amused comment as the portrait of the king melted into that of his daughter, a serious infant with corkscrew curls, all unconscious of the monstrous absurdity of her voluminous skirts. This transition from one picture to another was accepted by one of the audience as an opportunity to shift his chair, and Leigh saw the bishop's salient profile thrown for a moment on the canvas, before he subsided again to the general level.

The young man supposed that in thus discovering the whereabouts of the bishop he had also located his daughter, and he marked the spot against the restoration of full light to the room. Meanwhile he maintained his position in the door, and would have continued to do so, had not his host tiptoed to his side and thrust him into a near-by chair.

For some time he remained almost rigidly still, as if he would make amends for the slight noise of his entrance by subsequent self-effacement. The succession of pictures, even the surrender of Breda and the scene of the jolly drinkers, shared his attention with that part of the room in which he had seen the bishop rise, but he soon realised that no further discoveries were possible as yet in that direction, and began to pay more heed to the lecturer.

He knew in a vague way that he was sitting beside a woman; but presently this consciousness increased till it became a delicate and pervasive atmosphere. There was a seduction in the shadowy presence that distracted his thoughts from the woman he loved, sitting somewhere there in the obscurity before him. He experienced a well-nigh guilty pleasure in this temporary yielding to a feminine influence other than that to which he had consecrated himself, and finally he admitted his deliberate appreciation. Leaning back in his chair and turning his head to satisfy his curiosity, he saw for the first time the trick his mind had played him. Convinced though he had been that Miss Wycliffe was in another part of the room, he had known all the time with his senses that she was sitting at his side. At least, it now seemed to him that his apparent disloyalty was in reality an involuntary tribute to her quality. She had made herself felt even when he thought she was another. As he looked down at her rounded cheek and white shoulders, she lifted her eyes with a recognition as suppressed as that of acquaintances in church, and then whispered inaudibly in the ear of a companion beyond. It was now that he saw a bunch of lilies of the valley in the hand that rested in her lap, and knew by what channel his imagination had been awakened.

The lecture was shorter than Leigh had anticipated, and all too short for his desire. There was in his present position a peculiar, unspoken intimacy of which he felt that she also must be aware. It seemed unlikely that he could see her alone, and he cherished every moment as perhaps the best that would be vouchsafed. Almost before he realised what had happened, the walls of the room sprang into view at the sharp click of the electric lights, and he saw the lecturer, previously a disembodied voice, making his final bow. As he rose with the others, he caught a glimpse of many faces already familiar, and felt unexpectedly at home. Among the crowd he recognized Cardington by the bishop's side, Cobbens's smiling face, several of his colleagues, and a number of the students. The tide set toward the door, and they were carried before it. Not until they reached the less crowded room beyond did Leigh perceive that Miss Wycliffe was still closely attended by the companion with whom she had exchanged an occasional whisper at the lecture.

"You remember Mrs. Parr?" she reminded him.

"I do indeed," he replied, though till now he had received merely the impression of a face vaguely familiar.

"But you passed me only yesterday on the street without recognition," Mrs. Parr complained. "I don't know whether I ought to speak to you or not."

The tone of her voice, which aimed at charming piquancy and realised only an airy affectation, attracted his attention, and revamped her upon his mind as one of the party of star-gazers. Her personality was acrid and insistent, and he imagined that the friendship between the two women was of her own making and maintenance. The nature of her greeting left him no choice but a flat and awkward confession of absent-mindedness. This trifling irritation, however, was of small moment compared with the fact that Miss Wycliffe was evidently content with his company and not disposed to leave him, as she could easily have done upon a reasonable pretext. The three continued together, drifting in the same direction through the rooms which now began to present a bewildering spectacle of changing groups and colours. Their talk was the usual art jargon which the recent lecture suggested, but in this Leigh bore perforce a subordinate part. It was Mrs. Parr who appealed to him from time to time for a confirmation of her views concerning composition, drawing, and high lights, and each appeal presented itself to him as an interruption. At last he was merely relieved to find that she had disappeared. Miss Wycliffe regarded him with a curious look, in which disapproval of his unconscious rudeness was mitigated by an indulgent appreciation of its cause.

"You 've succeeded in driving her away at last," she said, with a touch of severity.

He divined that he was not seriously under the ban of her displeasure. "I?" he echoed, disingenuously.

"She began by taking a great fancy to you," she went on, "that night on the tower, but you simply refused to pay any attention to her. And to-night you behaved in the same manner. When you came and sat beside us, she regarded it as quite a romantic little event."

"She has a husband, has n't she?" he questioned bluntly.

"Yes, but she still indulges fancies for 'stunning young men.'"

"Then Mr. Parr does n't answer to that description, I suppose?" he queried.

"Mr. Parr is more stunned than stunning," she achieved, quick as a flash.

"I don't wonder at it," he said, laughing heartily. "I seem to see the poor fellow sunk in a coma of marital despair."

"This is extremely wicked and ungrateful talk in both of us," she murmured, "and I shall encourage it no further."

Leigh was fairly intoxicated by Miss Wycliffe's manner toward him. She had never been so frankly sweet before, and he had never seen her as radiant as now. She had the air of one filled with a mischievous impulse, which she restrained with an effort. A suggestion of daring lurked in her momentary sidelong glance, and awoke in him a responsive exhilaration. To other eyes that watched them curiously she appeared to assume a certain proprietary right. If she introduced him to this one or that, if they ran into other groups from time to time, she contrived with exquisite skill to make these interruptions temporary and to keep him to herself.

Their progress, though he was but dimly aware of it, was something of a triumphal one for himself. He was sufficiently striking in appearance when alone to attract attention, and Miss Wycliffe's evident partiality now made him a special mark for speculative glances. He began to gain an appreciation of her absolutely entrenched position in that society in which the older women were inclined to pet her and the older men indulged in gallant little speeches. As for her contemporaries, they paid her tribute in their kind.

In this way they participated in the slow movement that for some time had been turning toward the dining-room. Through the open door they saw the solid phalanx of earnest eaters that surged about the tables. To disinterested eyes the sight might have appeared one of agonised appetition, in which, as in battle, some particular person or movement arrested the attention for a moment from the general effect: a stout and determined matron planted like James Fitz-James upon his rock; a tall youth with salad raised aloft as he turned to make his escape; the perspiring face of some bewildered darkey, who could have found ample use for the hands of a Briareus in the stress of conflicting orders. Leigh turned to his companion with an enquiring glance.

"Will you allow me to forage for you, Miss Wycliffe?"

She shook her head. "Not yet, at any rate," she answered. "What a spectacle! We might step into the conservatory and rest awhile."

She led the way through a near-by door into the vistas of greenness beyond. There she paused from time to time to call his attention to some rare plant, to lift some blossom to her face, and then went on with the assurance of one entirely at home in her surroundings. Through the thick branches Leigh caught more than one glimpse of a white dress, and heard an occasional ripple of youthful merriment. The vision of one of his students hurrying down a parallel aisle with spoils from the table gave him a humorous sense of fellow feeling.

At length they found a seat of twisted branches, screened by a row of palms. From the hallway of the house the scraping of the violins came intermittently, like the sound of crickets in a distant field, so faint that they could also hear the puffing of the breeze through a raised panel in the slanting roof of glass above their heads. It seemed as if the wonderful Indian Summer night were trying to steal in among the guests through that small opening, to bid them be still. To look up at that vitreous, transparent roof was like gazing into the enchantment of a witch's mirror, so imminent was the mysterious depth of the night beyond. Miss Wycliffe emitted the ghost of a sigh, as if to express her relief and sense of escape, perhaps her weariness. Leigh, following her glance upward, caught sight of a solitary, brilliant star peeping through the triangular aperture, and reflected with keen appreciation that it was the planet Venus. There was an opportunity in this chance apparition, of which, however, he did not avail himself. It was true that she had drawn his eyes down from the stars to gaze into her own, and that the planet upon which they then looked together had been given the name of the goddess of love. These facts, beautifully coincident as they seemed to him, would not bear expression in words. She would think he was making conventional love to her, and his instinct forbade such an obvious beginning. He spoke, therefore, only of the refreshing contrast of their asylum with the noise and glare of the drawing-rooms, noting with a passing pang as he did so that the lilies of the valley which she had carried with her thus far were drooping in her lap, their expiring odour quenched by the heavy fragrance about them.

Perhaps it was a touch of feminine perversity that led her to acquiesce in his animadversions upon the scene they had just left. It was certainly a function in which she was peculiarly fitted to shine, and she had taken her part with every appearance of enjoyment; yet her comments were more caustic than his own.

"The lecture was the better part," she declared. "I wish it had been longer — but you missed a good deal of it."

"Yes," he explained. "I did n't get away from the debate till after six o'clock."

"The debate!" she echoed, fixing him with an interested gaze. "I had forgotten that this was the evening. Tell me about it. Did your tentative efforts with Mr. Emmet bear any fruit, after all?"

He shook his head, smiling. "It was an extraordinary spectacle," he mused. "The pit and the balconies, the aisles, the space at the back, and the stairs down to the sidewalk were filled with labourers, packed close together, their dinner-pails in their hands and their pipes in their mouths. You could have cut the air with a knife into chunks of tobacco smoke."

"And how did he seem?" she asked.

"You have good reason to be proud of your *protégé*, Miss Wycliffe," he answered, kindling with generous enthusiasm. "Emmet outclassed his opponent completely — in style, in delivery, in subject-matter, and, as it seemed to me, in the justice of his cause. I was so amazed and impressed that I carried the atmosphere of the thing with me until — until I dropped into the chair beside you, and then I forgot all about it."

She moved uneasily and toyed with the flowers in her lap, then glanced up at him, but not with the glance of a woman who is ready to listen to a declaration of love. His next words were determined by that look, and there was no little self-renunciation in his pursuance of a subject he would fain have dropped for one nearer his heart. He had to remind himself once more of the shortness of their acquaintance, and of her natural curiosity concerning one of the crises in a struggle which had interested her so keenly.

"It only shows how far one's judgments fall below the mark sometimes," he went on. "Not till this afternoon did I get a true perspective of the man, when I saw him standing there, perfectly self-possessed and powerful, reading his speech" —

"Reading!" she interrupted.

"Yes, reading, and actually gaining in effectiveness by doing so. It seems that each speaker was allowed only twenty minutes, and rather than run the risk of going off on a tangent, he had written the whole thing out — but he knew it practically by heart."

"It was like him," she commented. "He 's clever. But what did he say?"

Her eager interest, her knowledge of the man, the compliment she paid him, filled Leigh with bitterness of which he was ashamed. He found himself under the necessity of describing to the woman he loved the triumph of another man, who had, as he now saw clearly, appealed to her imagination. To be sure, it was nothing more than that, but as far as it went, it hurt his own cause to play the rôle of the narrating messenger. He was focussing her attention upon an exciting drama in which he had borne the inglorious part of witness; but he was too proud a man to be ungenerous in his comments, or to let her see the duality of his mental state.

"His speech was a frank setting off of the masses against the classes," he returned. "He said the same things I had heard him say in conversation, only with more pith and point. Emmet has the Irish gift of expression when he 's aroused — there 's no doubt of it. He practically took for his text: The Man in the One-storied House against the Man in the Mansion. One thing struck me as especially keen. His opponents have been claiming that the city is a great business corporation, in which the citizens are stockholders and the officials directors; but Emmet pointed out the fact that in a stock company a man is entitled to as many votes as he has shares, while in a municipal corporation the individual, not the stock he possesses, is the unit. He made a good point there in maintaining that the corner-stone of democracy is manhood suffrage, not property suffrage. He tore apart that apparently reasonable comparison, and showed beneath it an attempt to rob the poor man of his rights."

She nodded her appreciation. "It was a good point, but I don't agree with him, nevertheless. Property-holders ought to have more to say in the management of a city than those who have nothing at stake. If I had my way, I would confine manhood suffrage to state and national elections."

Leigh was struck by these words into silence. For the first time she had made him realise that she was a rich woman, though he had heard from Cardington that the bishop merely held his wife's large property in trust for the daughter. Now he detected in her a shrewd and practical strain, perhaps an inheritance from some ancestor who had laid the foundations of her fortune. He saw also that her revolt against the moribund spirituality of the wealthy class to which she belonged was offset by a consciousness of possession, so that she could support Emmet one moment and condemn his theories the next. On one side of their natures, Leigh and Miss Wycliffe touched in sympathetic understanding; on the other, they were as far apart as the poles. No poor man, however civilised he may be, can range himself on the side of wealth, unless he is either a fortune hunter or a sycophant, and Leigh was neither. At the present moment he merely felt, with a sinking of spirit, the existence of an artificial barrier between them of which he had previously been but dimly conscious.

"I'm something of a socialist myself," he said, "only, I'm waiting for a great leader and a reasonable propaganda."

"You'll never find either," she retorted with spirit. Then her face softened into the expression of a listener to a good story. "But don't let us discuss these endless and stupid questions. What I want is the personal and spectacular side of it. How did the two men compare? And with which of them did the people side?"

"With their own representative, naturally. I was impressed with the tenseness of the feeling. The audience cheered Emmet until he had to remind them that they were cutting into his twenty-minute allowance. Then they kept silent, but more like animals held in leash, I thought, and I could n't help wondering what would happen if the cork should suddenly pop off and let out all that bottled sense of ill usage. When Judge Swigart got up, he did n't mend matters by referring continually to Emmet as his 'distinguished antagonist,' in a tone that suggested irony rather than respect. He said he was pained and astonished to hear Mr. Emmet declare that there was class feeling in Warwick; he himself had never detected any; he objected to the setting off of aristocrat against democrat, when all were democratic; he denied that the city was run by a clique."

"Really," Miss Wycliffe remarked, laughing, "he could n't expect them to swallow that. Of course Warwick is run by a clique — it always has been — and I 'd like to see them turned out for once."

Leigh was no longer astonished at the sudden swinging of the pendulum. "They did n't swallow it," he said grimly, "and it took Emmet's personal appeal for fair play to make them stop their hissing and catcalls. I thought there 'd be a riot at one time, but instead, the men began to get up and walk out, leaving Swigart talking to their backs. I was swept along with the crowd, and that was the last I saw or heard."

He caught the flash of her eyes at the vivid picture he had drawn, and could no longer conceal his bitterness. "When I saw Emmet standing there, whipping up the mob and then holding it in check, and thought of his scanty schooling, I felt the handicap of professorial pursuits" —

"Oh, eloquence!" she interrupted, with a quick and tactful understanding of his hurt. "There's nothing easier in the world, if you only have the knack. I think I may say so, as the daughter of a bishop. Mr. Emmet moved them merely because he voiced their own hatreds and prejudices in a clear and convincing way, not that he said anything so very remarkable." There was undisguised scorn in her tone, and he understood that this was the heiress speaking. "A trumpet makes more noise of a certain kind than a telescope," she went on, "and the noise is what the people like. Have you ever read 'Numa Roumestan'? At the risk of preventing you from doing so, I must recommend it."

She lifted the flowers as if to throw them away, preparatory to a return to the house, but he defeated her intention by deftly reaching forward and taking them from her hand.

"You must allow me to save them, Miss Wycliffe," he explained, in answer to the quick inquiry of her sidelong glance. "Let me indulge a romantic impulse to-night, though we have had such an interesting conversation on other matters." He thrust the lilies of the valley into an inside pocket of his coat, and sat looking at her with a speculative sadness that made a light or flippant comment on her part impossible. She said nothing, though her poise conveyed the suggestion of intended flight. She doubtless appreciated the fact that this was what she might have anticipated, that she could not lead a young man who was in love with her to such a place without this result. Her purpose in so doing was best known to herself. In his mind there was evidently a doubt whether it was wanton cruelty, or a desire for information concerning her *protégé*. He began to wonder, in view of the persistence of her interest in Emmet, whether she had not divined the cause of his late arrival from the first.

"When I first came in," he continued, "and Littleford thrust me into a chair beside you, I caught the scent of these lilies before I knew they were in your hands. It was something like an experience that befell one of my ancestors as he approached America after a two months' voyage in a sailing vessel. They were nearing Virginia one night in May, and a land breeze blew the fragrance of flowers to them across the water before they saw the shore. *On desperate seas long wont to roam*— You know the verse?"

She rose hurriedly to her feet, distressed, perhaps repentant. "You must not," she protested in a low voice. "You must not."

"There is some reason why I must not?" he questioned, confronting her with paling face. She nodded a confirmation of his fear. "Then I must ask just one question more," he persisted miserably. "Suppose the reason did not exist — I don't ask you to tell me now what it is — but suppose there were no reason. Would you forbid me to love you then?"

For a moment she did not reply, and he watched her face as one who would read an enigmatical page from the book of fate. The question demanded an answer, a definite reply, which she was not prepared to give. He saw dawning in her eyes a recognition of him in a new light; it was as if she now contemplated the possibility she had rejected. In this attitude of mind, as in nothing else, the bishop's cold and calculating nature disclosed itself in the daughter, and Leigh divined that she did not wish to love him, though she allowed herself to desire the tribute of his love. It was this desire that enabled her to enjoy the situation, to convey to him a denial that was not absolute. She might withdraw herself, — she had said that she must, — yet something might remain, something more than friendship, less than the claims of an acknowledged love.

"If the reason did not exist," she repeated slowly, "then — perhaps."

He heard the words with a gesture of acquiescence, and followed her in silence down the aisle in the direction of the house, wondering why he did not stop her before it was too late and ask her whether he had heard aright, why he had not kissed her when he could have done it so easily, and thereby, perhaps, have shaken her allegiance to some other claim. For his intuition told him that though he was not her acknowledged lover, he was by no means a mere friend. It was this assurance that gave him hope, and there was comfort in the thought that he had not lost all by daring too much.

About two hours later, Leigh descended from the billiard-room, where he had been playing an inattentive and indifferent game with one of his colleagues, and encountered Bishop Wycliffe coming into the hall from the library in company with his host and Anthony Cobbens. The major part of the company had already gone, leaving a few elderly talkers in various corners, and a group of young people dancing in the ballroom, which had been cleared after the lecture for that purpose.

"Ah, Littleford," the bishop was saying, "these entertainments of yours are entirely delightful. You give every one the particular thing he wants and send him away contented: to the artistic a glimpse of Velasquez; to the young, a turn of the 'light fantastic toe;' to me, one of your good cigars and a quiet chat in the corner about old times. But have you seen Felicity?"

Littleford, a comfortable-looking man, with a fresh colour, a yellow beard, and a general air of good living and goodfellowship about him, hurried off to the ballroom to inquire. Meanwhile, Cobbens helped the bishop into his coat with the solicitous attention due a swell official of the Church, who was at the same time the father of Felicity Wycliffe. Leigh, performing the same operation for himself, was chatting with the other two, when Littleford returned to say that his search had been in vain.

"She probably went home with Mrs. Parr," the bishop commented. "They came together, I believe."

"Mrs. Parr is still here," Littleford said, "and complaining that Miss Wycliffe has deserted her."

The bishop's residence was only about a block away, on the other side of the street, and Leigh saw that Littleford's information caused no particular concern. Seeking significance in everything she did, he wondered whether her early withdrawal contained any element of hope for himself, or whether she were ill. As he recalled the suppressed excitement of her manner, he feared that this latter conjecture might be the true one, and his heart contracted with anxiety. The three men descended the broad steps together, the bishop remarking upon the lateness of the season and the clemency of the air. When they reached the street, he turned with Cobbens in the direction of his house, with an absent-minded though courteous good-night.

Though the leaves of the elms had now in a large measure left the branches, the suggestion of a cathedral nave was still presented to the mind. The equidistant trunks were, as formerly, the supporting pillars, but the vista had suffered a mournful change, as if the roof had suddenly been blown away, leaving the springing ribs a black tracery against the autumnal sky. This ruinous work of the frost was strangely offset by the soft witchery of the breeze, which seemed either a reminiscence of the spring that was past, or a promise of the spring to come. Leigh's thoughts took a turn in harmony with this influence. He began to readjust his first conception of Miss Wycliffe, — she was now Felicity in his unspoken meditations, — and to realise that she was not like a Russian noblewoman, ready to sacrifice all for socialism, as he had at first conceived her. Had she continued to be such a magnificent and heroic creature, he would have loved her less. She gained infinitely more than she lost by this more intimate view. She was no longer a possible reformer and a subject for the historian, but a woman pure and simple, with all a woman's alluring inconsistencies.

Immersed in this new conception, he was startled by a voice and hurrying step behind him, and turned to meet Cardington's outstretched hand and the hospitable offer of a cigar. As they went on together, his colleague commented in his voluminous way upon the evening they had just spent, and before long, with Velasquez as a starting-point, he had launched upon a compendious history of Spain, interspersed with anecdotes of his own travels in that romantic land.

In this way they had almost reached the end of the rows of elms, when they saw before them a man and woman walking with the slow and tentative steps of those absorbed in deep personal conversation. At their nearer approach the woman turned quickly for a moment, said something in a low voice, and then the two hurried abruptly down a side street, whose thicker shadows offered a screen from further observation. Leigh, listening but inattentively to his companion's disquisition and meditating still of Felicity, gave the couple only a fleeting glance, thinking, if he thought of them at all, that they were a maid from one of the neighbouring houses and her lover.

The next moment he realised that he had heard the intonation of Miss Wycliffe's voice, or had imagined it. He would doubtless have thought it mere imagination, some accidental resemblance to which his ear had given identity, had not Cardington's manner registered a sudden emotional disturbance. He paused in his narration, like one smitten with mental atrophy and searching for the word that was about to reach his lips. His position on the inside of the walk offered a barrier between Leigh and the retreating couple, and he gave a curious impression of maintaining that position carefully as they passed the street. Then he resumed his story with something of accentuated intensity. Neither made the slightest comment on the incident.

CHAPTER X

MISTRESS AND MAID

MISS FELICITY," said Cardington, standing before her with a humorous suggestion in his manner of presenting arms to a superior officer, "I have come to perform what is both a duty and a pleasure; I have come, in short, to — pay my bet." With these words he carefully laid a box of candy upon the table.

"You have my sympathy, Mr. Cardington," she returned, "not so much because you have lost the bet, as because you were under the necessity of ending your sentence with such an insignificant word. I saw that you were groping for a polysyllabic finish." She was in the best of spirits, and prepared for the exchange of quibbles in which they sometimes indulged.

"But my finish is best expressed by just that abrupt and insignificant monosyllable!" he cried, his solemnity swept away by a mood of extravagant banter. "Now, you know, since we have elected a professional baseball player to the mayor's office, I foresee great possibilities unfolding in municipal affairs. I rather anticipate that the city fathers will seek recreation from their arduous labours by indulging in an occasional game of ball in the park. I hope to have the pleasure of applauding our respected mayor as he walks up to the plate as of yore and knocks out a home run. Not a bad idea, bishop, is it?" For Bishop Wycliffe had entered the room quietly and stood behind his daughter, listening to the speech with a wide, appreciative smile.

"It is extremely probable," he now answered. "I shall be surprised if some such innovation is not introduced. And why not? *Tempora mutantur*, my friend. We have a President who so far forgets the traditions of his office as to beguile his spare moments by whacking the heads of his friends in a game of singlestick. Why not a mayor who plays baseball in the park? What an old fogy you are, Cardington!"

"Old!" Cardington echoed ruefully. "My dear bishop! And you baptised my infant head after you came to your Episcopal office!"

"Ah, but I was young then," the bishop retorted, "or I should never have assumed that responsibility."

They were still laughing at this sally when the maid appeared in the door to announce that dinner was served. Seeing a late caller, she hesitated, and Cardington broke in.

"I must go now," he announced. "Remember, Miss Felicity, not to overdo the matter of eating sweetmeats. There would be a certain unnecessary redundancy in such an indulgence, a carrying of coals to Newcastle, so to speak."

"No, you must stay to dinner," she urged, "and afterward smoke one of father's cigars to solace you for the loss of the box you might have had if the election had gone the other way."

"Might have had!" he retorted. "You mean would have had. I hope there was no doubt of your intention to pay your honest debts."

"Come," the bishop interrupted, taking him by the arm and marching him away, "enough of these quibbles. You must stay, of course."

"But this is the irony of fate," he continued, glancing back fondly at his daughter, "that in spite of all my preaching, I have not been able to convince the one nearest me of the iniquity of gambling."

"I am reminded of that historic occasion," Cardington answered, "when you preached a sermon against the putting on of apparel and the plaiting of the hair, and extolled the inward adornment of a meek and quiet spirit, quoting St. Peter and Tertullian with singular effect" —

"But how was I to know," Miss Wycliffe put in, "that the return of that sermon from the bottom of the barrel would coincide with the appearance of my new hat?"

"It was just that lack of coöperation between you and your right reverend father which scandalised the congregation," Cardington commented.

"It was a beautiful hat," she mused regretfully. "Every one admired it."

"Yes, yes," said the bishop. "'And a man's foes shall be they of his own household.'"

Strange to say, this quotation, so lightly uttered, was destined to strike the keynote of the dinner. The subject of the mayor-elect was too vividly present in the minds of all three to be long absent from their conversation, and a discussion inevitably followed a reminder from Cardington that this was the evening in which the people were to celebrate their victory by a procession. Miss Wycliffe jestingly proposed an illumination of the house; but her father's patience with her perversity was exhausted. Doubtless the triumph of the cause he hated intensified his emotion. Had the judge been elected, he could easily have been magnanimous, or could have twitted her with good humour. But there comes a time, even to the most philosophical parent, when the independent judgment of a child seems a personal affront, an ingratitude "sharper than a serpent's tooth." He loved the beautiful old city in which his life had been spent, and wished to see it ruled always by men of his own class. To him the outcome of the election was really a significant calamity, the beginning of the end of the aristocratic democracy he cherished. Not Lincoln, the dissenter and man of the people, but Washington, the gentleman and Churchman, was his ideal of an

American statesman. It is perhaps not too much to say that he would prefer to see the wheels of government falter for a while in the hands of an aristocrat rather than to see them turn smoothly under the propelling power of a plebeian, were it in his suffrage to make the choice.

"An illumination of the house," he echoed bitterly. "We might put some flaming hoops out in the street, so that the clown can turn a somersault through them as he passes by."

The taunt was greeted by Cardington with something of excessive appreciation, and the bishop, softened by his success, threw back his head and smiled broadly at his daughter, regarding her through half-closed eyes.

It was evident that Miss Wycliffe did not relish the absurd picture of her *protégé* thus presented to her mind, and a reply in kind seemed to hover in the scornful curves of her lips; but she was a woman of finer mettle than to show either her anger or her hurt.

"Mr. Cardington," she said with subtle mockery, "your part in the performance is plain" —

She broke off, attracted by the unusual manner of the maid, whose hand, as she placed a plate before her mistress, shook violently, so that she overturned a glass of wine. Miss Wycliffe glanced up, surprised at this awkwardness in one usually so adroit, and pushed back her chair to avoid the crimson stain that was slowly spreading toward the edge of the table. Unconsciously all three suspended their conversation to watch the simple operation of putting salt upon the cloth. Cardington, turning his eyes toward his hostess with an anticipatory relish for the rest of her sentence, was suddenly struck by an inexplicable change. Her face had become white in a moment, and she was regarding the maid's trembling hands with curious intensity.

"You were saying, Miss Felicity,"—he reminded her.

"What was it?" she asked, recovering herself with an effort. "Oh, yes. I was about to suggest that your height marks you out as the proper person to hold up the hoops."

"Agreed!" he cried. "If you will stand by and hand them up."

This raillery was only a passing incident, for Miss Wycliffe's mood had suffered a permanent eclipse. The bishop returned more reasonably and with perfect seriousness to the subject of the election, and finally launched upon a long diatribe after the Platonic fashion, with the professor as a sympathetic interlocutor. His daughter refrained from combatting him openly, but he divined and resented her unexpressed opposition. Her attitude was one of finality; her silence indicated an indifference to his opinions more exasperating than words. It was the young astronomer, he reflected, who had helped to crystallise her strange views. His lurking fear that she might one day marry and leave him was aroused at the thought, and his heart contracted with jealousy. She possessed in his eyes something of the sanctity of a vestal virgin, one who must not be profaned by marriage. In such an event, also, his cherished hope that she might complete the quadrangle of St. George's Hall was likely to be frustrated forever. These fears moved him to argue with a bitterness that served only to defeat his purpose the more.

Cardington's participation displayed an animus which hitherto had been absent from his remarks upon the subject, as if the result of the election had stirred him deeply, also.

"I have heard," he remarked, "that Emmet would never have been elected if it had n't been for the support of Bat What's-his-name and the gang that makes his saloon a rendezvous."

Whether this insinuation produced some effect upon the maid, or whether the nervousness she had exhibited during the whole evening culminated coincidently, none present could know, but no sooner had the words left his lips than a finger-bowl which she held fell from her hands and broke in a hundred glittering fragments on the carpet. At this second proof of incompetence the bishop started irritably, and looked at her without a word. That look was sufficient. A professor unexpectedly roared out upon by his class, a clergyman breaking down in a sermon, could scarcely have experienced a keener sense of professional failure and humiliation than the unfortunate girl knew at that moment. To the bishop's astonishment, she suddenly raised her apron to her eyes and burst into tears.

"That will do, Lena," Miss Wycliffe said quietly. "We've had enough excitement for one evening. You may go; and send Mary in your place."

"What's the matter with the girl?" the bishop asked, when the door had closed behind her. There was an odd blending of annoyance and compassion in his tone.

"Lena hasn't been well," his daughter replied, "for some days."

"Then let her rest awhile," he said; "and call the doctor, if it's necessary." The incident seemed to distract him entirely from his previous thoughts. "It is just such a scene as this," he continued, "that reminds one of the hidden tragedies going on all the time in the lives about us. Lena is usually a very quiet and skilful girl, and it has been a pleasure to have her about. Perhaps she's going through some love affair, as big a thing in her existence as the chief events in ours are to us. Girls of that class so often acquire a certain gentleness and breeding from association, and then marry some rough coal-heaver or mechanic. It's a pity — a great pity."

"She's pretty enough to meet a King Cophetua," Cardington remarked judicially.

The observation was directed at Miss Wycliffe, and was an effort to make her forget the conversation in which his animus had led him to transgress even his elastic limits with her. There was something almost comical in the concerned expression of his light blue eyes, no longer fierce, as he gazed at her. But she met this dumb appeal coldly.

"If you will excuse me, father," she said presently, "I'll go up to Lena's room, and see whether she's really ill."

The two men, left alone, drank their coffee, and then went into the bishop's study to smoke. As the door remained open, Cardington seated himself in a chair that commanded a vista of the drawing-room, and lingered on in the hope of Felicity's return, until the first lights of Emmet's triumphal procession began to flash past the windows from the street beyond.

"Here comes the Imperator up the Via Sacra!" he commented, rising. "I must go out and see whether he has a slave behind him to whisper in his ear, *Memento te hominem esse.*"

But it would appear that his curiosity concerning the procession was short-lived, for when he reached the scene, he plunged contemptuously between the straggling columns, and gained the further curb. Then he turned down a side street, without one backward look, and took his way forlornly toward St. George's Hall.

The bishop, not sorry to be left to his meditations, had made no effort to detain his visitor. Now he extended his hand for another cigar, changed his mind, and sat thinking. Genuinely indifferent to the procession passing by with torches and transparencies and bands of music, he remained with his back toward the windows, his head sunk upon his breast. He was steept in a depressing consciousness of having mismanaged the situation with his daughter, of having widened the breach he had meant to close. His tact had failed him because his affections and interests were too intimately concerned, much as a surgeon's hand might falter in an operation upon one of his own family.

What was the meaning of this strange interest which Felicity had taken in the career of a man normally beyond the radius of her acquaintance and sympathy? At first it had seemed a jest, then a sentimental charity maintained in foolish pride, but only recently had it created anything approaching estrangement between them. And this situation was the more difficult to bear because of their long intellectual and artistic companionship. She was more to him than a son, for he had a priestly appreciation of the subtlety of women. He had watched her mind unfold in foreign travel, little dreaming that this experience with him was sowing the seeds of discontent with her narrow environment which were now beginning to bear such bitter fruit. Something of a celibate by nature, he loved to think of her as an eternal priestess, who would consecrate herself and her fortune to the work of the Church.

Going back in his mind, he could date the acute stage of the present situation pretty accurately from the inception of her acquaintance with the young professor of mathematics. Leigh had disclosed a certain Western democracy that first evening, and had established immediately some sort of understanding with his hostess. The bishop had seen them together at Littleford's house, and had drawn his own conclusions. Divination of the hidden interests and emotions of others was one of his gifts, a gift he had so fostered that sometimes his moves in the intricate game of life were like strokes of genius. He did not doubt now that Leigh was in love with his daughter, and for the first time he was seriously doubtful of her attitude toward a young man. Proud and beautiful, she had always held herself aloof, with something of fine scorn, from the frock-coated, silk-hatted, conventional men of her acquaintance, as if she shared her father's opinion of her worth, as if she secretly sympathised with the plans she knew he cherished concerning the completion of the college quadrangle. Was she now to decline to the level of this fortune hunter, this crude young Westerner?

As for Cardington, of course he loved her, too; but the bishop knew her too well to suppose that the professor would ever captivate her imagination.

He had always been within her horizon, and he served the useful purpose, from the bishop's point of view, of distracting her attention from more formidable aspirants.

That hour of reflection resulted in at least one definite resolve: Leigh's connection with the college should cease at the expiration of the year for which he was engaged. Meanwhile, the bishop might need a rest, and might take Felicity with him to Bermuda, leaving the affairs of the diocese in the hands of his coadjutor.

Having reached this conclusion, he became aware of the fact that the procession had long since passed, that the house was very still, and that Felicity had evidently retired to her room for the night. He got up and walked aimlessly out into the drawing-room, where the lights were turned low. He listened at the foot of the stairs, and thought to call her, but the silence seemed ominous, and for some reason he forbore. Was she really so deeply hurt that she would not return and bid him good-night? They had never been demonstrative, but neither were such affectionate courtesies ever omitted between them. He could not seek her now and demand an explanation. From such a scene he shrank instinctively. To-morrow he would begin on a new tack. He would relegate this absurd difference of opinion between them to the obscure corner it deserved, where he trusted it would soon die of neglect. It was indeed fortunate for the bishop's rest that night that his conjecture concerning his daughter's state of mind fell so far short of the truth.

When Lena Harpster left the dining-room at her mistress's command, she was in a condition bordering upon hysteria. Her burst of tears expressed the culmination of a long strain. She had dared to disobey her lover, driven to desperation by the increasing importunities of the young man of the house in which she served, and had fled to Miss Wycliffe's as to a refuge. But her letter of explanation to Emmet had remained unanswered. Was it not her love for him that had driven her to disobey? She even refrained from signing her appeal for pardon, as a concession to his desire for secrecy. Either he was too much absorbed, or his wrath was implacable, and a fortnight had passed without a sign. Would he seize this pretext, now that he had been elected mayor, to cast her off forever, as an impediment to his progress in the world? This doubt had so preyed upon her nerves that Miss Wycliffe was not far from the truth when she explained to her father that the maid was ill. But it was the vilification of her lover, to which she was forced to listen in silence, that had brought her emotions to a disastrous climax.

Once in her little room, she threw herself upon the bed and sobbed without restraint, but her abandonment to grief was short. She arose hastily and bathed her eyes in cold water, moved by the reflection that tears only served to mar her beauty, the sole dower she possessed. There came into her mind also the sudden resolve to go out and see the parade. She would stand near one of the electric lights, and perhaps her lover would see her and give some sign, a smile, a wave of the hand, whose significance would be known to them alone.

Fired by new hope, she discarded her apron and cap and donned her prettiest skirt. Then, standing in front of her little mirror, she applied a dash of colour to her pale cheeks with a few deft touches, spreading it into an appearance of nature with a bit of chamois skin. She opened the bureau drawer and threw a white silk waist upon the bed. But now a perplexing question arose. Which riband should she wear about her throat? She selected two, and laid them before her for consideration. This one she wore when he first kissed her; but the new one was prettier. Which would he prefer? Or was it possible that he would not see her at all in the crowd? While these thoughts ran through her mind, she smoothed her eyebrows with her pink little thumb, and paused to reflect that she would like to have a tiny eyebrow brush with an ivory handle, such an one as she had seen among the toilet articles on her mistress's dressing-table. 'Then she glanced at the ring on her finger which Emmet had given her, and for a while she forgot everything else, fixed in contemplation.

The ring was one whose peculiar value Lena was far from realising: a Maltese cross of old gold, set with four uncut emeralds. Seen by gaslight the stones lacked brilliancy, and she thought the ring itself awkward and heavy. From the first she had regarded the gift superstitiously, as if the dull green stones, like four dull eyes, emitted a baleful influence. It was significant of her utter lack of religious associations that the cross itself suggested no counter charm. Had she been a Catholic, that shape alone would have made the ring a talisman, but her people were Congregationalists, to whom religious symbols were anathema, and she herself had seldom gone to church. In fact, Lena was vaguely disappointed in the ring, and even ashamed of it. If her lover were as rich as he said, why had he not bought her a diamond? But repentance followed hard upon this questioning. The ring was not what she desired, but it was a pledge of his love, and she raised it to her lips.

She was in this attitude, her thin, white shoulders glimmering bare, a graceful and nymph-like figure, when a light tap at the door froze her into immobility, and then she saw her mistress's face reflected in the mirror. With a little cry of embarrassment, she turned and leaned against the bureau, lifting one hand with that instinctive gesture which Greek sculptors have immortalised in many a lovely statue.

"I did n't mean to frighten you, Lena," Miss

Wycliffe said quietly, when she had shut the door carefully behind her and taken a chair. "I thought you might be ill, and came to see whether I could do anything for you."

The words were kind, but there was something in the speaker's manner that was less assuring. Her face was pale, and her eyes were bright, but not with compassion. Confronting each other thus, they presented a striking contrast. The mistress's dark, rich beauty made the other's prettiness seem ephemeral, without reducing it to the level of the commonplace; for Lena was not common as servants are, either in her personality or in the atmosphere she created in her room. Even her visitor, absorbed as she was in her own purpose, was not unconscious of the cleanliness of the place, of the artistic aspiration represented by the few prints on the walls.

"I did have a turn, Miss Wycliffe," Lena stammered, "but I feel better now. I thought, perhaps, if I went out to get the fresh air" —

"And saw the procession?" her mistress suggested, with a curious smile.

Lena nodded guiltily, and a flush quickly spread beyond the limits of colour which art had fixed in her cheeks.

"Perhaps that would do you good," Miss Wycliffe remarked. Then, with a penetrating regard, she added, "And I suspect you have a personal interest in the parade, Lena."

"I want to see Mr. Emmet," the girl confessed, as if she could not resist the inquisition of the stronger nature confronting her. But there was pride, too, as well as implication, in the admission.

"Perhaps it was Mr. Emmet who gave you that odd ring?" Miss Wycliffe continued relentlessly.

"Yes," in a voice that was almost a whisper.

"And you regard it as an engagement ring?"

"He did n't say so definitely, Miss Wycliffe. He told me not to wear it yet, and I did n't until to-night. And he made me promise not to tell — anything. You will keep my secret, Miss Wycliffe, until — until" —

"No, child, I won't tell, but I 'm sorry to say that I shall have to deprive you of the ring, as it happens to be one of my own. I noticed it on your hand at dinner, and while I was sorry to think of taking it back, I could n't help feeling that a fortunate chance had restored it to me."

Lena drooped pitifully, and her mistress deigned to explain further, though her tone was hard and cold.

"If the ring were of no special value, I should n't mind, but it belonged in the family, and I prized it highly. Undoubtedly I lost it in the car, where it was found by Mr. Emmet. Let me see it; I 'm sure I can't be mistaken."

She held out her hand imperiously, and resistance to her will was impossible. At that moment the head of the procession could be seen through the trees, and the sound of music floated up to the little room. Lena held the ring in the palm of her hand, forgetting that she had ever thought it less than beautiful, and her tears began to drop slowly. Then she surrendered it with an impulsive movement, like that of a conquered child. Her heart failed her. The necessity of giving up the ring seemed prophetic of the future; and moreover she was now too late to see him pass.

"Yes," Miss Wycliffe said coolly, "I was right. The cutting and arrangement of the stones is peculiar, and there's not another like it in Warwick." She arose to her feet, the ring gripped in her hand till the edge of the cross almost cut her tender palm. "And one thing more, Lena. I have a reason for asking it. Do you love Mr. Emmet?"

There was no need to answer, and indeed the girl could not utter a word, so intense was her misery, so overpowering her assurance of impending disaster.

"And do you suppose he loves you, just because he has kissed you and given you this ring which he picked up in the car?"

There was still no answer, and the next words came like the voice of fate.

"Well, I feel it my duty to tell you that a man in his position can only be amusing himself when he pays attention to a girl in yours. You must have nothing more to do with him. It's better for you to know it now, and to have done with this infatuation, for I tell you plainly, he means nothing that an honest girl can accept."

Left alone, Lena tottered as if she would have fallen; then sank upon her knees and crept to the window. With trembling fingers she raised the sash and let in the cool night air upon her bare neck and shoulders. She let in also a fuller burst of music and cheering, and through her tears she saw the lights dancing wildly, like a procession of fallen stars. Somewhere in that stream of splendour and sound he sat in his carriage, proud and triumphant, and with no thought of her.

In her own room Miss Wycliffe stood before her mirror, looking now at the white reflection of her face, and now at the recovered ring which she had tossed upon the bureau, while in her splendid eyes blazed the light of a great and implacable anger. For the man who was at that moment passing by in the street, who had taken her gift and bestowed it upon a servant, had been her husband for more than two years.

CHAPTER XI

AT THE OLD CONTINENTAL

ONE snowy afternoon, shortly before Christmas, Mayor Emmet came out to his sleigh from the City Hall, drawing on his gloves with a sense of release from unaccustomed confinement. While others hurried along, shrinking into their coats as if they would withdraw as far as possible from the nipping cold, he strode slowly and breathed deep, showing a strong man's conscious enjoyment of Nature in one of her sterner moods. His manner displayed a consciousness of something else also, of the position he meant to grace. He was already beginning to appreciate the discomfiture of his enemies. They had thought to find him bewildered and inefficient, and had encountered instead a man whose conception of his rights and duties was just and adequate. Strange also to superficial thinkers was his dignity of bearing, to which the *élite* of Warwick paid the compliment of their resentment. But that ease and precision of movement, that steady glance of the eye, had been transferred from the baseball field to become singularly effective in the mayor's office.

It was now that his experience as a conductor also yielded its harvest, though few of those whose money he had formerly collected realised the valuable knowledge they had given him of human nature's more difficult side. They had unwittingly taught him to control his temper under trying circumstances, to hear much and say little, and now they wondered at the success of their teaching. Even his language was exasperatingly correct. They might claim that his speech for the joint debate had been written by another, but this would not explain the excellent quality of his ordinary conversation; and it never occurred to them to point to him with pride as a product of the public schools for which their city was justly famous.

That a man not connected with one of the old families, not possessed of a baccalaureate degree, should really be effective in the mayor's chair was such an unheard-of presumption that they denied the fact. Yet they could not claim that he assumed excess of air. His lack of exuberance was so marked, he had taken hold of his work with such seriousness and sobriety, that he seemed to be a man of great coldness, or one whose sense of triumph was tempered by a secret trouble.

Those whose condemnation was not altogether sweeping found the phrase "an imitation" capable of conveying some consolation. He was like a wooden cigar, a lead quarter; in short, he was a loaf baked in a different oven, and that was enough. How could a man that wore a heavy watch-chain possess the genuine quality? In the judgment of the First Church, that chain was heavy enough to bind him hand and foot and to sink him in the depths of the sea.

But criticisms from this source Emmet accepted as a matter of course, much as a Republican candidate for the Presidency would count on a solid Democratic South. A more serious menace to his future lay in the attitude of some of his own supporters, who supposed that the mayor's office could now be their lounging-place and headquarters. Bat Quayle, the leader of a strong constituency of the submerged tenth, had already departed breathing vengeance, when he discovered that there was nothing in the new *régime* for the Boys. They had given their votes to Emmet in the confident expectation of special privilege and protection; but he had made no promises, and had none to keep. No previous Democratic mayor of Warwick had ever been able to dispense with the Boys, and it remained for Emmet to offset their loss by winning new supporters during his administration. Bat Quayle, he knew, would be picked up by his opponents and used against him two years hence; but two years seemed a long time, and the mayor shook out the lines and started off with a burst of speed, as if he would tumble black care into the snow behind him.

The street was like a vista of fairyland. A new fall of snow had covered all unsightly stains of traffic, and now lay heaped on every inch of horizontal space, on branch and roof and post, on window-ledge and fence. The sky was clearing, and the last belated flakes were floating slowly downward, detached from the burdened roofs by light puffs of wind. To one glancing upward, the feathery visitors seemed to drop from the widening spaces of pale blue sky. The ringing sound of snow shovels and the crisp crunching of pedestrians' feet indicated a falling mercury. The air was filled with the jocund jingling of sleighbells, now coming, now near at hand, now lessening into the distance, a pleasing confusion of silvery sounds, not inharmonious in their varying pitch and intensity.

Emmet, crouching low among his blankets, drew his cap down over his eyes and let out another link of speed. At last he was free to take up the problem that occupied his leisure moments. His wife had gone South with her father on the very day when he had expected her to lift the veil from their marriage, and an acknowledgement of the justice of her anger caused him to keep the secret still, awaiting her decision. He could count the times they had met during the last two years on the fingers of his hands. This relationship, which had promised so much at its inception, was the great mystery of his life, and every succeeding month it became more unreal, more inexplicable. Now he went back in his mind to the time when the bishop's daughter began to take his car rather than another, and conveyed to him in some subtle way the impression of her preference. By little and little he had played the dangerous game that made such an appeal to his vanity.

The poets were true in their psychology when they pictured the distress of mortal men beloved of goddesses: Tithonus and Aurora, Venus and Adonis, Diana and Endymion. How could aught but tragedy result from such loves as these? How could a mortal have dared to lift his eyes to such a height unbidden? The gulf between Miss Wycliffe, beautiful, rich, aristocratic, and Tom Emmet, the professional baseball player and street-car conductor, was to his mind as impassable. It was she who had first suggested the possibility of a bridge between them. His conception of her mental states was as dim as our dreams of the inhabitants of Mars. Of her ennui in that life which seemed to him all lightness and pleasure, of the romance with which she invested his commonplace days, of the possibilities she read in his personality, he had no conception; but to the lingering of her fingers in his own, to the glance of her eyes, the primitive man within him made response.

Love of adventure lured him on. The subtle courtship progressed apace, and if any of Miss Wycliffe's friends noted her growing friendship with the conductor, it was merely to praise her sweet and unassuming humanity. At the end of that period of increasing intimacy, marked by little incidents which no lover in the retrospect can ever arrange in their proper sequence, the night of his marriage loomed in his memory, every detail ineradicable. Their coincident absence from Warwick was naturally unnoted; and who, in all the range of human probabilities, would be present to see them meet at a certain day and hour on a certain street corner in New York?

Life is a careless maker of plots. The villain did not appear to shadow them to the obscure old church, to lurk in the darkening pews and see them married, to watch their exit in the twilight as man and wife, to observe from a safe distance their long talk on the corner of the street, and, most inexplicable of all, to see her call a passing cab and drive away in evident haste, perhaps in sudden alarm.

Emmet would never have brooked such desertion from a woman of his own class, but the ascendancy which she had established over him from the first was not materially shaken by the fact that she was now his wife. He did not even know where she passed the night, while he walked the streets, a deceived and baffled bridegroom, until in desperation he took the midnight train and arrived home at dawn, too weary to care for aught but sleep.

When they met again in Warwick, she resumed her mysterious power of direction as before, and his status as her husband gave him no advantage that he dared to press. He accepted the secret interviews she granted, and learned at last the part he had to play. On that promissory note which she had given him at the altar she paid the instalment of a few elusive kisses, and he discovered to his dismay that he must do some great thing to make himself worthy of her, before the note should be paid in full. It was she who had seen the possibilities of his connection with a union and of his interest in politics, and had suggested the career he was to follow. His election as mayor was to be crowned by her acknowledgement of him before the world. This was the plan in which he had acquiesced, as one who had only to obey and to wait humbly for his reward.

But a sense of power developed with the struggle. It was true that she had directed his feet into the right path; but once there, he began to feel that he would have found it unaided. She was secret with him, giving and withholding as she chose. He saw her with other men, and his strong nature rebelled. Should she be free, while he was bound? At a certain meeting he presented this point of view, but she said truly enough that the men she met were nothing to her, and that to do as he wished would only excite surprise and suspicion. She would fain play the part of Egeria and lay down the law to him in stolen interviews beyond the city. But Emmet had never heard of that delightful arrangement, and the rôle of a Numa in the making began to be intolerable to him. When they met again, he no longer upbraided her, for he had met Lena Harpster at a lodge dance in the interval, and in the culmination of a reckless mood, he had taken his revenge. Only a consciousness of his own duplicity saved Felicity from his insistence and restored her power.

Emmet meant that the affair with Lena should go no further, but the memory of the kiss she had given him drew him back at last and he sought her out, as the first man might have sought again the first woman in the Garden of Eden, after an ingenuous shame had driven them asunder. And hereupon began a titanic struggle in his soul. He knew that he loved his wife and meant to be true to her, but Lena's kisses more deeply stirred his blood. She was wonderfully pliant to his will, as pliant in reality as he seemed to be to the will of his wife. For longer or shorter periods he neglected her, only to come back again to find her more helpless in his grasp, himself more than ever fascinated by his power over her. It was a milestone in their nameless relationship when he feigned jealousy of her other admirers, when she admitted his right to question. Then came the night when she had fainted beside him in the half-finished building, and he knew that the jealousy was real. After that wild moment of parting at the gate, he resolved to see her no more. The prize he had sought so long was almost within his grasp, — the mayoralty and a wife who would make that office but a stepping-stone to something higher, — and he would not forfeit his reward. He meant also, as he had meant all along, to be essentially true to his moral obligations.

The pathos of Lena's position he but dimly discerned, and his cruelty was unconscious. The election almost swept her from his mind, and the note in which she disclosed her refuge in his wife's house stirred only a momentary anxiety. He would deny whatever she might say, and he felt that she would quietly acquiesce in her fate when she knew the truth. But he had forgotten the ring, and the ring was his undoing.

At the very moment when he turned his sleigh into Birdseye Avenue he pressed his hand to his side and felt Felicity's letter crinkle beneath his touch. He had carried it continuously with him, and knew its brief contents by heart. She had hoped the letter might have been one of pure congratulation; she had intended to keep her promise and to come to him as his wife before the world, but now he must wait until she had time to think over her course of action by herself. An explanation would be useless; but she had recovered her ring, and she knew the value he put upon her gifts, both this one and the greater gift of which it was a symbol. And that was all.

The fact remained that she had not utterly cast him off. He would be punished, but not forever, and he divined that his probation would end with her return. He had a firm conviction that her sense of obligation was like his own, that repentance and good conduct would restore him to her, and he longed for an opportunity to tell her how it had happened, how much less guilty he was than she might suppose. If he had been weak with Lena, he knew that he had also been strong. He had withheld his hand from taking all, when she would have offered no resistance to his will. Surely, that counted for much, and his temptation had been great. Cheered by this thought, little realising that the very simplicity of his position would make it difficult for his wife to understand, that the vulgarity of his temptation was to her its worst feature, he glanced down the long avenue with a sudden sentiment at the thought of passing her home.

This street, because of its width, the absence of car-tracks, and its comparative freedom from heavy traffic, was often the scene of races in the winter, and now he saw a group of sleighs ready for the start. As the bunch drew away, his own horse came abreast of the others, and without prearrangement he found himself racing side by side with Anthony Cobbens.

"Well met, Mr. Mayor!" the lawyer cried cheerily. "I'll race you down to College Street."

Emmet glanced at his opponent and shouted his acceptance of the challenge, his sporting-blood surging suddenly to his very finger-tips. As he gave his mare the whip and held her in from breaking, he looked once more at the figure whizzing along by his side against the western light. Something in the pink, pinched face, the red, eager eyes, appealed to his sense of humour, and he laughed aloud. Emmet had more than one reason for wishing to beat this man. He had worsted his candidate in the election, and now he would show him a clean pair of heels in the race. His heart beat with exultation as they two drew away from the others. For a moment the thought of Felicity flashed through his mind as they passed her house and the nose of his pacer was shoved an inch ahead of her opponent.

"Good girl," he murmured, squaring his jaw; "good girl. Steady there, steady."

The feathery snow flew up in whirls from the flying heels. Pedestrians on the sidewalk paused and cheered as they flashed by under the bending branches of the elms, under the electric lights that were just then beginning their sputtering struggle for supremacy against the sunset. Emmet had learned to handle horses during an apprenticeship at the race-track in his boyhood, and now the judgment with which he had selected his pacer was amply vindicated. Her steaming flanks swung powerful and free; her long stride just missed the dashboard of the sleigh. As he lightly touched her swaying back with the whip for a final burst of speed, he loved the beast as only a horseman can, and murmured terms of endearment that were equally applicable to a sweetheart.

The head of Cobbens's horse was just in a line with Emmet's shoulder as they passed the goal. The mayor turned while the other began to drop behind and shouted a derisive farewell, with a parting flourish of the whip. The victory was as sweet to his heart as the taste of honey to the lips. The race had changed his mood completely, filling him with a joyous truculence. He would gladly have embraced the opportunity of a rough knock-down and drag-out fight with a picked champion from the enemy's camp.

As he passed along the eastern border of the campus and glanced up at St. George's Hall, it no longer appeared the impregnable fortress of privilege he had once thought it. Yet, in reality, the towers of the college had never looked more formidable. Rising magnificently at the crest of a bleak expanse of snow, the embrasured battlements, silhouetted against the sunset sky, might well have suggested to a beholder grim thoughts of mediæval strongholds and robber barons. The red orb of the sun, hovering just above the rim of the western hills, flashed successively through the windows of the long, low hall, like a running trail of fire. Emmet was directly opposite the towers when he saw the muzzle of the telescope rise slowly above the topmost line of coping, as if it were a living thing stretching itself to take a look at the surrounding country. Evidently Professor Leigh was preparing the instrument for an observation. Emmet pictured the platform heaped with snow, imagined the cold air rushing into the small shed through the open roof, and wondered that his friend's enthusiasm could brave such discomforts to win a knowledge so remote from the interests of life.

He turned his eyes once more to the road and winked away the glare of the sun. The floating spots, changing from crimson to green and from green to purple, so obscured his vision that he failed to see the figure of a woman plodding slowly on in the centre of the track. The wind was directly ahead, and the hood of a golf cape so closely enveloped the woman's head that she for her part was deaf to the sound of coming sleighbells. Emmet had been driving slowly to give his mare a breathing-space. Now, as she veered suddenly of her own accord, he drew in the reins with a jerk, and brought the sleigh to a standstill so near to Lena Harpster that he could have touched her with his hand.

Her first alarm was followed immediately by such a chaos of deeper emotions that the cry died away on her lips. She stood looking at him with shining eyes from behind the fringe of her tall, peaked hood; then, in a voice as low as the wind, she spoke his name. At the same moment she laid her hand on the edge of the seat, either obeying the impulse that would draw her to him, or because she must otherwise have fallen.

Since their last meeting, their night together in the shelter of the half-finished building, he had resolutely put her from his thoughts. He had supposed the victory won, and never more so than on this very day, when self-interest and moral obligations had marshalled such invincible arguments before his mind. If he had seen her from a distance, if she had been on the sidewalk instead of in his very path, would he have had time to wrestle with his temptation and to overthrow it? Would he have whipped up his horse and passed her by without a look of recognition? But the hypothesis is contrary to the fact, and suggests a fruitless speculation. It would seem that his evil genius had planned deliberately to put his resolution to the supreme test, first by filling him with arrogant self-confidence, then by firing his blood with a triumph over his enemy, and finally by placing within the reach of his hand the very woman whom most of all, in his heart of hearts, he longed to see.

As she stood there before him, all her soul concentrated in her eyes, her lips apart in breathless waiting on his will, it seemed that trouble had never put a marring finger upon her beauty; and suddenly he knew the overmastering hunger of his nature.

This was the woman that loved him without question, the woman he wished to take into his arms and carry off. The place and time were propitious. Already the sun had set — there was no one in sight — and just beyond the ridge the open country beckoned.

"Lena," he said, his voice vibrant with reckless abandonment to his desire, "jump in here, quick!"

There was no previous greeting, no inquiry or explanation, no dalliance with emotion. His first words were a command, her inevitable response was to obey. Now, as always, she threw the whole responsibility upon him. And Emmet felt equal to the burden. He was like a god, knowing good and evil. He meant to do good in the main, but just now it was his pleasure to deviate a little. To-morrow he would come back into the straight road and hold it to the end. This resolve gave him a peculiar exhilaration, a special license for the definite indulgence.

The next moment she was nestling close to his side, borne swiftly along as in a dream to the music of the bells. Putting his left arm behind her shoulders, he drew the robe up across her face to ward off the whistling wind. For some time she was content to lie thus in silence, lost in a sense of his strong embrace and in a consciousness of the romance that had come to her so unexpectedly out of loneliness and despair. This was her own lover, come back to her again, but he had never come thus before; and she remembered with a thrill that he was now the mayor of Warwick, taking his pleasure in his own sleigh. She wondered whether he had admired her golf cape; she had no need to wonder what he thought of its wearer. As if to reassure her on this very point, he spoke aloud.

"Lena, I had clean forgot you were so pretty."

"What did you say, Tom?" she asked, thrusting her head above the robe to hear again the praise she feigned to miss.

"I had forgotten," he repeated, "that you were so confoundedly pretty."

"I should think you would have forgotten it," she retorted. "You gave yourself time enough to forget almost anything."

This unexpected show of spirit invested her with new piquancy, and he laughed aloud. At that moment the sleigh emerged upon the brow of the hill and caught the full force of the wind. A violent gust filled her hood and threw it back upon her shoulders, disclosing, as by the touch of a magician's wand, the mass of soft curls blowing wildly about her little head, her flushed cheeks and shining eyes. She saw the wide, desolate sweep of the valley, dotted here and there with twinkling lights, the belt of crimson against the distant hills; and then she saw his eyes bending near her own, as if they would drink in the beauty of every line of her face and every curl. His head blotted out the western sky, and their lips met.

The sleigh began to drop below the hill, faster and faster, and her pulses kept time to the jingling of the bells. Without premeditation she had struck a new note in their relationship. The resentment which she had scarcely acknowledged to herself had grown during the weeks of unmerited neglect, and its expression had given her an advantage, had filled him with strange pleasure. He would find it harder to stay away from her so long again. From now on she was armed with a new knowledge of her lover.

Emmet too was seeing new light. He did like opposition in a woman, but not that of a superior mind and a higher station. He would have enjoyed the tingle of Lena's little hand smiting his cheek, that helpless little hand which he could so easily control. Out of this special indulgence which he allowed himself sprang an unexpected menace for the future.

"Where are you taking me, Tom?" she asked presently.

"To Hillside," he answered, "for supper. I can have you home by eight o'clock. There's no hurry about your getting back?"

"Oh, no," she assured him. "The housekeeper thinks I have gone to my sister's."

"Then you are still at the bishop's?"

"Yes — and with very little to do. I get rather lonely sometimes."

"And Miss Wycliffe did n't take you with her as her maid? I should have thought she would."

He longed to ask her about the scene attending the discovery of the ring, and to find out just what his wife had said. Of course she had not told the truth, but a new suspicion of Lena's astuteness made him cautious. He was impressed by the fact that Felicity had left Lena behind. Had she loved him wholly, would she not have made every effort to keep her rival from his path? Was this her way of showing that she refused to regard a servant in such a light? Or was it thus that she put him upon his honour? At the thought he winced with a consciousness of guilt. A third explanation occurred to his mind. Perhaps she left Lena behind, like a bait in a trap, with the old housekeeper as spy. This was a mean thought, he knew, suggested by his own duplicity, but he resolved to act upon the supposition and to avoid all danger.

"She spoke of taking me," Lena said, "but changed her mind, and left me to help take care of the house."

She too had questions to ask, but instinctively she shrunk from disturbing the deep content of the present moment. The road they travelled was not the one Leigh had taken that October afternoon when he made his bicycle trip to Hillside, but a parallel way about half a mile to the south. As they neared the other side of the valley, Emmet took a cross-cut back to the northern road and passed her house, without knowing that the place at which she glanced in passing was her home. She had no desire to tell him, for it seemed mean and homely in her eyes. She saw her father's silhouette on the curtain, his corncob pipe in his mouth, and while she would have liked to exhibit her lover to her family, she was ashamed of their rustic ways and feared the impression they might make upon the mayor of Warwick.

The village of Hillside was typical of the country. In summer time a stream dropping down from the hills turned the wheels of a large paper mill. There was a general store, a post-office, a white, wooden Congregational church with four Corinthian pillars, and an inn dating from Colonial days, as its swinging sign-board, adorned with the blurred image of a Revolutionary soldier, bore witness. This inn, "The Old Continental," had recovered from its moribund condition with the advent of the automobile, and was often the scene of gay supper parties from Warwick. It had received a new coat of yellow paint and a new roof, but the Society for the Preservation of Colonial Landmarks had decreed that the figure of the soldier on the sign-board should remain untouched by the brush. Thus the uniform that had once shone so spick and span in streaks of buff and blue would better recall the ragged regimentals of the well-known poem.

The distance from Warwick was ten miles, but it still lacked something of six o'clock when Emmet drove into the stable, blanketed his mare, and lifted his companion from the sleigh. He led her through a side door and into a small room that had formerly been the kitchen. Here, in a huge brick fireplace, blazing logs threw out a dancing light that glinted on the polished mahogany table and quaint chairs, and disclosed the dark red walls and brown beams, as well as several highly coloured English coaching scenes.

Lena seated herself close to the blaze, and glanced up at the sooty arch above her head with small appreciation of the historic memories of the place, of the archæological interest inherent in the swinging crane and twisted andirons. It did not occur to her, as it would have occurred to many visitors, to open the doors of the baking-ovens at the side and to peer within. If she thought at all of these things, it was merely to realise their inconvenience, and to be reminded of the similar room in her own home.

And yet, though she did not know it, she was eligible to membership in the Daughters of the American Revolution. Her ancestors had taken their muskets from just such chimney places to go forth and fight the British. Only, they had never kept their family records, their descendants had never climbed high in the world; and now one of them was sitting in her own appropriate environment, suggesting in her sweet face, her curling hair and slender figure, in the very cape thrown over the back of the chair, the familiar picture of Priscilla.

It was Emmet, an American of only one generation, who reminded her of the legend that Washington had stopped there overnight on his way to take command of the army in Cambridge; but she was too deeply absorbed in thinking how handsome he was and how much he seemed the mayor to listen with attention to his remarks. She took his intellectual interests for granted, and accepted as a matter of course his larger knowledge of a history that was his merely by adoption. Love was her mental theme and the sum of all her interests, not academic speculations concerning the effect upon America of the great Irish immigration of the last century, of which indeed she had never even heard.

She had not observed his quick, keen glance at the stalls of the stable, nor noted his relief when he found them empty. They two had the house entirely to themselves, but the larger dining-room, seen through the open door, suggested guests, for the tables were set and the lights turned low.

"Yes, sir," the waiter answered in reply to his question, "there 's a party due here at six-thirty from Warwick. Mr. Cobbens is bringing 'em out."

"Then hurry up," Emmet commanded. "Bring us something hot, and be quick about it."

The man did not know him; there was consolation in that. But Emmet realised the necessity of getting away before the party should arrive. There seemed a fatality in the coincidence that he and Cobbens should cross each other's path twice in the same day, when often they did not meet for a fortnight.

As Lena Harpster drank her coffee and noted her lover's increasing uneasiness, she gave no sign of her resentment, part of which was due to the unwillingness of a sensuous nature to leave a warm corner by the fire on a winter night. Her awakened sense of power made her for the first time rebellious of being hustled out of sight and kept in the dark. The struggle between her and Emmet was on in earnest, and her heart beat fast with a resolve to delay him there until they should be seen together.

It was quarter after six when the jingle of bells was heard before the door, and Cobbens's voice calling loudly for the stable-man. Even then there was time to escape. Emmet had only to pay his bill and slip quickly out the side door as his enemy entered at the front. Lena too saw the chance and started from her chair, her eyes fixed upon his with instinctive questioning and submission, all her high resolves forgotten in the actual crisis. Their respective attitudes at that moment were singularly characteristic. She was now poised for instant flight, with something of the air of a creature of the wild whose safety lies in speed of wing or foot; he, who had thought to steal away unobserved, now threw the thought contemptuously aside. A dull glow of anger spread slowly over his handsome features, and his jaw grew rigid.

"Sit down, Lena," he said peremptorily. "Sit down."

She sank into her chair again, grasping the arms with her thin, white fingers.

"What's the matter with your supper?" he asked with a short laugh. "Have you lost your appetite?"

She took up her spoon once more, but her hand trembled, and she was forced to steady it against the table.

Cobbens entered the door, throwing back his great-coat and tugging at his gloves, to meet Emmet's slow turn of the head and forbidding stare. It was the look of one who feels himself intruded upon and waits in no very amiable mood for an apology. The rest of the party followed, six in all, and Emmet recognised Mrs. Parr, Felicity's neighbour and friend, among them. The worst had come to pass. Of Cobbens's malice there could be no doubt, but in all probability he had not observed Lena in the bishop's house during her short stay there before her mistress's departure. Mrs. Parr, however, was in and out daily; and what more choice bit of gossip could she write to her friend than an account of this unexpected meeting? If there was any momentary doubt in his mind, it was dispelled by her action. One sharp look told her all she wished to know; then she turned her back upon her friend's servant and the mayor of Warwick with ostentatious indifference, holding out her hands to the blaze and chatting of the inclemency of the weather. The others followed her example, closing in about the fire, as if utterly unconscious of the two of whose presence they were in reality so acutely aware. Cobbens alone chose a different course.

"Ah, Emmet," he said, with easy familiarity, and in a tone that displayed a distinct relish for the situation, "I did n't mean to interrupt your *tête-à-tête*, but the fact is, I had engaged the place for dinner — wired out this afternoon, just before you beat me so handsomely on the avenue. That 's a fine pacer of yours. If you want to part with her at any time, I hope you 'll give me a chance to make you an offer."

"I believe the waiter told me you were coming at six-thirty," Emmet answered coolly, glancing at his watch. "Miss Harpster and I were counting on another ten minutes to finish our supper."

If the speaker's first stare had failed of its effect, his words now interpreted it and gave it significance. The lawyer's jauntiness dropped off, as if a modicum of respect for this man had found its way into his calculating soul. Here was no poor devil of a conductor, but the mayor of Warwick, a very different person; and though he was surprised in an adventure of gallantry, he intended to carry it off with a high hand, as nobody's business but his own. Cobbens reflected that the mayor's companion might well be a respectable girl, perhaps his *fiancée*. Now he was quick to see his trespass and to mend his manner.

"Why, of course," he assented graciously. "Don't let us hurry you. The fact is, we all came in here before we noticed the room was occupied, to leave our wraps. Quaint old place, is n't it? I fancy Washington could have touched the ceiling with his hand. There 's a fire in the larger room, I believe."

The party took the hint and filed out in silence, leaving Emmet and Lena in possession of the field. But to the mayor the victory appeared only half won, for Lena had risen to her feet at their first entrance, as if to remain standing in the presence of her superiors, thereby discounting his own assurance. Now she flushed beneath his look of speechless indignation and reproach. If she had only supported him! If she had only realised what a beauty she was in contrast with the other women! As superior as he knew himself to be to that little Cobbens, or to the bland and elephantine husband of Mrs. Parr.

No words now passed between them, but in the other room the chatter continued, though in a more subdued key. Emmet knew well that they were only waiting for him to depart to break forth into excited comments; and presently he heard the phrase, "What assurance!" followed by a lull, as if some one had made a cautioning gesture. Then the somewhat dilapidated piano began to tinkle, as it could tinkle only under the mincing fingers of Mrs. Parr. Had her random notes been given a name, they might have been called Mrs. Parr's Tale of a Wayside Inn.

Emmet realised that the fat was in the fire. If he were only free, he reflected bitterly, how little he would now care what they thought or said! He would take Lena as his wife and make a lady of her, and force her down their throats by the power of the money he meant to win. Position was something, but money everything. Let him once get their husbands and sons in his debt, and every door would open wide. With Felicity as his wife, his acceptance was assured; but in his present mood he scorned to make his entry in such a manner. Now, if he spelled aright the handwriting on the wall, he might remain forever on the outside of the citadel he had thought to storm. He rose to his feet and paid his bill with a rueful conviction that he had fought not wisely, though so well.

The very action, the very throwing down of the money, somehow restored his earlier exhilaration, the assurance of a man who can pay the bill. It seemed symbolic of future accounts of whatever kind, all of which he meant to square. The web he had woven for himself was now so complete, his discomfiture so inevitable, that his spirits rose to meet the odds he had arrayed against himself.

Lena, divining his change of moods, but little realising their depths and heights, was tenderly grateful. He had stood up for her before them all, and her wildest hope was fulfilled. As they drove from the inn yard, she seized his left hand, which he was about to thrust into his glove, and pressed it tremulously to her lips. In this way she thanked him for what she thought he had done for her, for what in reality he could never do; and at the touch of her soft lips his accusing conscience spoke to him in no uncertain voice.

During the homeward drive she was unexpectedly easy upon him. An innate womanly tact warned her not to speak of the incident as committing him to her before the world. For the second time that evening she showed the wisdom of a daughter of Eve in dealing with one of the sons of men; but her gaiety, a new sparkle in her eyes, a new vibration in her laugh, told him unmistakably the secret joyousness of her heart. He had a glimpse also of what she might be under happier circumstances; he saw how the bud which was even now so sweet could unfold in love's sunlight; he imagined the possibility of their life together; but none the less he determined that now at last he must break away from her forever.

The immutable fact remained that he was married to Felicity. Though he had ceased to attend his own church from the days of his boyhood, the Catholic doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage remained as one of his traditions, and this too in spite of the fact that he had been married by a Protestant priest.

He had not committed the one sin which his wife's church recognised as the only cause for divorce. There was no escape from his obligation, provided his wife would forgive him and take him back. Her wrong to him had borne the bitter fruit of his wrong to this defenceless girl. Let her come back — she could not come too soon — and face him with his faithlessness. He would tell her what she had done, and bid her to forgive him or not, as she chose.

The wind was now at their backs, and having slackened its velocity until it approximated their pace, it seemed to have died down altogether, leaving them to glide along in a dead calm. Emmet looked up at the stars, which had never seemed to shine with such peculiar brilliancy, and thought of Leigh. There was the one man in whom he could confide. None of his old acquaintances could be trusted with such a vital secret. The astronomer bore no part in the struggles and jealousies about him. His very occupation at that moment invested him in Emmet's eyes with something of the impartiality and spiritual aloofness of the seer. It did not occur to him to seek the help of the confessional, to make his peace with the church from whose instruction, even as a boy, he had fled to the public schools, in spite of his mother's disapproval and the angry protests of his parish priest. That very night he would go to Leigh, if not for advice, at least for sympathy and understanding.

Immersed in such thoughts, he said little, but from time to time he drew Lena to him and kissed her, not with his former intensity, but with a softening sense of impending farewell. They had come within sight of the towers of St. George's Hall, looming against the pale horizon, when she threw him into sudden panic.

"Tom, dear," she said, "did you know that Miss Wycliffe took away the ring you gave me?"

"Took it away?" he echoed.

"Yes; she said it belonged to her, and that she had lost it in the car. Of course, I had to give it up." After vacillating in delicate hesitation she went on. "I did n't mind losing the ring so very much, since it was really hers, but I was a little hurt that you did n't buy me a ring."

He winced perceptibly, and she hastened to make her peace.

"What a queer old thing it was! I liked it at first because you gave it to me, though it seemed to have an unlucky look, somehow. I'd much rather have had just a little ring, with a solitary diamond in it."

"Did you tell her where you got it?" he demanded abruptly.

"She asked who gave me the ring, and I told her. But I did n't tell her we were engaged, or anything like that."

"What did you tell her, then?" he persisted.

"Just that you gave me the ring, Tom. Then she told me you must have found it in the car."

"I suppose she blamed me for not returning the thing to the office," he suggested.

His effort to appear indifferent did not escape her awakened perception. She suffered again the pang of losing him that had brought her to her knees on that dreadful night, and fluttered toward him in terror.

"Oh, no, Tom," she cried. "She did n't say anything about that, but she seemed angry with me, though she was so quiet. I thought, Tom, — how foolish you will think me, — that she loved you and meant to take you away from me!"

He laughed harshly. "She love me!"

The bitter incredulity of his accent was too pronounced to be feigned, as indeed it was not, and she lifted her head, reassured. "I might have known it," she said, dashing away her tears with a tremulous little laugh, "but I loved you so. And she warned me against you. She said you meant nothing good by me. I suppose she thought you would want to marry a lady, now that you are mayor; but at the time I felt somehow that she wanted you for herself!"

A subtler and more highly developed man would have foreseen all this suffering from the first; he would have sown the wind with some knowledge of the whirlwind to come. But Emmet was a child in matters feminine, and he stood aghast at the thought of the probable effect upon Lena of the inevitable discovery of the truth. If the very fancy caused her such grief, what would she do when she found out that her imagination had been prophetic? A frantic desire to postpone the blow that must fall upon her so soon gave him the skill of a Faustus. He scoffed at the absurdity of her fear, and a bitter conviction of his wife's selfishness gave his arguments the ring of truth. Only, when he drew a picture of the difference between his social position and that of women of Miss Wycliffe's class, she stopped him with the assertion that not one of them, with all their money, was worthy to be his wife. She added humbly that she knew how little worthy she was herself.

As if the approaching end of their journey drove her on to lay her soul bare before him, she told him every detail of that interview with her mistress in her room, down to the moment when she had groped blindly for the window and looked out through her tears to see him pass.

He had planned to leave her some distance from the bishop's house, but now caution was useless. The street, however, was deserted thereabouts, though the night was still young, and no one saw their farewell. As he drove away and glanced back to see her figure still motionless against the snow, he experienced some of the punishment that comes to him who plays at ducks and drakes with a woman's heart.

CHAPTER XII

THE CONFESSION

AN hour later, Emmet approached the college through the maple walk with very different feelings from those he had entertained when he watched the sunset behind the towers. Then he had felt the glory of individualism, his own vivid power as opposed to the lethargy of institutions. But his recent experience had started the pendulum back, and now it swung to the other extreme. His self-confidence had been followed by an exhibition of weakness. He who could defy and control men was helpless before the eyes of a woman; he who had burned with indignation at the corrupt politics of his enemies, who had sacrificed his interests to principle by showing Bat Quayle the door, had gone forth and sacrificed his principles to his pleasure at the very first opportunity.

Though by nature objective rather than introspective, his experiences since his first meeting with Felicity were teaching him by hard blows the rudiments of his own psychology. Had he been unmoral, he would have remained unscrupulous and unreflecting, but the claims of right would not down. He saw the better way and approved it, but followed the worse, and his knowledge of this inconsistency was gall and bitterness to his soul. He was as genuinely repentant as it is possible for a healthy man to be while the taste of life is still sweet; yet without doubt a large measure of his repentance was the fear of discovery. In the recesses of his mind lurked a hope that Leigh would be able to show him some way out of the labyrinth, would somehow help him to escape the consequences of his misdeeds.

Born a Catholic, his instinctive attitude toward the established order of things was that of a dissenter. Yet here were religion and learning coming back, and not in vain, to claim their penny of tribute. He had defied the authority of the Church, and had nevertheless accepted her doctrine of the sanctity of marriage; he had scorned the College, and now he turned by preference to one of her representatives, influenced, in spite of prejudice and disillusioning experience, by respect for her ideals. There she loomed, seeming monolithic in her solidity, a part of the rock on which she was built, her windows sending out shafts of light into the surrounding darkness, an allegory in stone.

As he passed the windows, he saw within characteristic glimpses of college life. Half a dozen students were gathered about a fireplace with their pipes, clothed in every variety of garment from the sweater or bath-robe to the evening dress of one who had dropped in for a chat on his way to a dance. In another room a game of cards was in progress; in still a third a thoughtful plodder sat close to his shaded lamp, his head resting upon his hand, an open book before him. Somewhere above he heard a piano played with brilliancy and dash, and the rollicking chorus of the college song: —

Then we'll drink to old St. George,
(By George!)
Then we'll drink to our valiant knight,
With his trusty spear,
And never a fear,
And the dragon pinned down tight, tight, tight,
And the dragon pinned down tight!

Emmet listened to the refrain with a curious mixture of envy and contempt. Many a time these fellows had taken his car and discussed football news with him, but at no time, in his hearing, had their conversation indicated intellectual interests or risen even to the level of the socialistic problems that were dear to his heart. He had yet to learn more of college life than is disclosed by the sporting clique to a street-car conductor; but with characteristic self-assurance he thought he had penetrated to the very heart of the machine. The quiet and unobtrusive student, the leaven of the loaf, the future poet or statesman, had never attracted his attention or that of men of his kind. They saw only what was on the surface. It was the froth of college life that gave him a not unwelcome excuse to form caustic generalisations upon a privileged class.

He hurried along, relieved to meet no one on the walk, for there were few who would not have recognised him, and his mood was all for concealment. Observing from without that the light in Leigh's windows was dim, he concluded that he was still upon the tower and went on up the stairs, striking match after match to guide his steps. As he paused to extinguish the embers, he encountered the blank darkness of the walls, relieved by ghostly slits of windows holding here and there a star; and the hollow drumming of the wind was like the sea. It was a release to emerge at last from this series of aerial prisons and to stand beneath the wide sweep of the sky. In answer to his knock Leigh opened the door and confronted him, clothed like a Siberian Cossack.

"Still at it, professor?" Emmet inquired. "I should think you would be frozen out."

"Come in, Mr. Emmet," Leigh answered. "This is a welcome interruption. I 've been working at a problem now for a month, and was just beginning to get a little lonely."

His eyes shone bright in the dim light and his face was somewhat thinner than Emmet had remembered it, but his manner was buoyant and alert. The visitor took a chair and glanced about him with interest, noting the changes that had been made since he last saw the place. He observed an improvised windbreak of canvas, and a charcoal brasier in the corner.

"And how do you manage to work that sliding roof in snowy weather?" he asked.

"A broom, a shovel, some salt to melt the ice, and a little oil for the wheels" —

"Well, I saw your telescope rising up above the towers about half-past four, and was so surprised to think that you were still taking observations that I came up to see how the place looked."

"I'm making observations for the parallax of Arcturus," Leigh explained. "The atmosphere is clearer in winter, you know."

"How long might it take, now," Emmet asked jocosely, "to get at the facts?"

"Who knows? Others have been working at the same problem for twelve years."

Emmet emitted a low whistle. "What does it all amount to?" he demanded. "Suppose you do find the what's its name — parallax? It sounds like the name of some kind of weapon. Why don't you go in for some other line of business, before it's too late? There's the law, now — a short cut to politics. You could get somewhere in the world, if you did n't shut yourself up on this tower and spend your time in looking through that telescope."

The reproach was in reality a compliment, and Emmet would have been disappointed had his suggestion been received with favour.

"Since we 're comparing politics with astronomy," Leigh answered, "let me ask who was the governor of this State fifty years ago? Perhaps he spent a lifetime struggling for the place, and after his two years of office he was down and out for good, with the privilege of hanging his portrait among a hundred others on the walls of the State Library. But take any name connected with a scientific discovery, and it lasts as long as the world endures. Take even a lesser name — never mind your Galileos and Herschels. There 's Asaph Hall, who discovered the moons of Mars, and already, before his death, he is enjoying his immortality."

"But I thought you told me the instrument was no good," Emmet persisted.

"Not as bad as that. It is n't what I should like, but a man must do something, even if it 's only to keep in practice. It might stand him in stead some day in a larger place."

Emmet was too much absorbed in himself to catch the hint of restlessness these words conveyed. Leigh's profession, like the ministry, made him, in the mayor's eyes, a being apart from the life with which he was familiar. It naturally did not occur to him that the astronomer had been driven back to his duty by the scourge of suffering, much less that his own wife had wielded the whip. He saw only an inexplicable devotion to an ideal pursuit.

"Well," Leigh continued, with a sudden change of manner, "and how is the mayoralty getting on?"

Emmet's face darkened. "I had it out with Bat Quayle this morning and turned him down hard. He'll get back at me sooner or later. But that is n't what I came up to see you about. The fact is, I'm in trouble."

Leigh glanced tentatively at the sheets of paper on his table, covered with unfinished calculations, and hesitated; but his visitor's manner implied an urgent need.

"If I can be of any help to you" — he suggested.

"I'm not so sure of that," Emmet answered gloomily, "as that I want to tell some one what an awful fool I've made of myself."

"There are others," Leigh replied, with a bitter grin. "I know a triple-expansion ass not a hundred miles from here; so fire away."

Emmet went over to the brasier and warmed his hands, as if embarrassed for words with which to begin. Leigh fumbled in the pocket of his greatcoat and produced his pipe, then drawing up his chair opposite, he sat down to listen. No premonition came to him at that moment that the story his visitor had to tell in any way concerned himself, or would deepen the even melancholy of his present days. He settled himself comfortably, with a sense of justifiable relaxation from toil. The troubles of another might arouse his intellectual sympathy, but they could add no burden to his heart. He even experienced a pleasurable curiosity. Emmet was to some degree a mysterious character to him, though he no longer thought of him in connection with Felicity. Her departure from Warwick had put an end to that suspicion, and made it something of which he was ashamed. He divined indeed that the trouble concerned a woman, but not the woman who had gone away with such evident indifference to any man in Warwick.

"Well, Emmet," he said at last, "here I am, all ears. Perhaps it will help you to a beginning if I suggest that there's a woman somewhere at the bottom of the trouble."

The other placed his chair snugly in the corner, buried his hands deep in his pockets, and looked at the brasier with a fixed stare. "It's not one woman," he began, with a sensible effort, "it's two. I don't know any better way to give you an idea of the tangle I've gotten myself into than by going back to the beginning of the story. About five years ago, I had n't any more idea of going into politics than you have now. I was playing baseball in the summer and running a car in winter, and saving my money. My parents were both dead, and I was thinking that it was pretty near time for me to get married. I was never one to throw away my money with the boys,—it came too hard,—I did n't even smoke or drink, and"—

"That's a bad beginning," Leigh interrupted, shaking his head with mock seriousness. "No small vices — women."

Emmet took the comment with good humour. "No, I was n't an easy mark for women, either. I tell you my main idea was to get ahead, to save some money. I could n't stand poverty; I had seen too much of it. When I was a boy, I carried the washing for my mother after school hours. In summer I played baseball and hung around the race-track. If I had n't been so heavy, I'd have become a jockey and made my fortune quicker; but anyhow I had ten thousand dollars salted away by the time I was twenty-five. I'm thirty now."

Leigh was secretly somewhat amused by this prologue, which seemed to spring partly from the egotism of a self-made man, partly from an instinctive unwillingness to embark upon the confession to which he was committed. However, he was far from being bored. "I'm about thirty myself," he remarked, "and I'm worth about thirty cents. But that's a digression."

"Well, as I was saying," Emmet resumed, "I was n't an easy mark for women. I had too much at stake to get tangled up that way, but I was thinking that it was pretty near time for me to find a wife. There's a lady in this town — you'll hardly believe it — I did n't myself, at first — that took a fancy to me. She was rich and fashionable, and all that, the sort of woman I would n't have thought of in any such way; but gradually I began to notice that she took my car nearly every day. Even when she told me straight out that she preferred to ride with me, I did n't suspect anything, for she always had a pleasant word for all the boys. But after a while I woke up to the fact that she knew just when I would be at the City Hall, and managed her shopping so as to ride home with me. After that I began to take particular notice. When I took her fare, I was embarrassed by the look in her eyes. She had fine eyes, and a way of sizing me up that seemed to mean something. Sometimes our hands would touch for a moment, and then it was n't by accident; and by Christmas time I knew as well as if she had told me that if she was n't in love with me, she thought she was."

"You were a lucky dog," Leigh said, filling an impressive pause with the first chance comment that came to him. Afterward he wondered at the obstinate torpidity of his mind, for not even the reference to her deliberate look and fine eyes gave him the clew. All this talk of early hardship and of street-cars had put the narrator for the time on another level from that he now occupied in the world, and made his past seem his present. The very confession, and the manner of it, belittled the confessor, and Leigh took his characterisation of his admirer as rich and fashionable with a grain of salt, making some allowance for the point of view, some for natural vanity and a desire to impress him.

"I did n't think I was so lucky," the mayor answered simply. "Of course I was pretty well set up, but I never thought it would amount to anything, and it was a dangerous game to play. I was n't sure how far I could go, or how far she wanted me to go, and besides, I had mighty little chance to see her alone. There was always somebody near, and I thought if I overstepped the mark she might be offended, or her father might get on to it and have me fired for impertinence."

His listener suddenly abandoned his semi-recumbent position for one of alert attention and ceased smoking, not yet fully aware of the reason for his dawning excitement, except that the last words had called up a vision of Bishop Wycliffe to his mind. He was in a state of suspended perception, trembling upon the brink of a discovery he was loath to make, waiting with painful tension for more light.

"So I did n't even meet her halfway," Emmet was saying. "She kept asking me questions about my life, until little by little she knew all about me. But the thing that interested her most was the fact that I belonged to a union, and that I had read a good deal of political economy. Well, at Christmas time I got a box of books without any clew as to the sender, but of course I knew who sent them. They were Plato and Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus and

John Stuart Mill, and books of that kind. After that she began to talk to me, right before her friends or her father, of my studies. I read at the books, at first to please her and to have something to say about them, and then because I became interested. Her friends regarded me as one of her charities and began to patronise me, but all the time I knew she felt differently, though no one suspected it but ourselves.

"Just before I left the car to play ball in the spring, she said she hoped it would be the last time, for I was fit for something better. Several times she happened to be in Warwick that summer when we played there, and I saw her in the grand stand; and once, when I knocked a home run, I saw her wave her handkerchief to let me know she saw me do it. When I came back in the fall, we began with a new understanding. I had thought a good deal of her during the summer, and I knew she had of me. There was more between us than before, and it was only a question of time and opportunity before we should come together. We happened to take the same car one evening when I was off duty. All the way up we talked like two old friends, and when she reached her street, I helped her off and then walked over with her to her house on Birdseye Avenue."

A sharp crackling sound startled him into silence. Leigh had unconsciously been clenching the amber stem of his pipe with increasing intensity, and now it was ground to powder between his teeth. The meerschaum bowl fell to the floor, scattering a trail of sparks as it rolled away.

"Hello!" Emmet cried. "You've broken your pipe."

Leigh was groping for the bowl and stamping out the sparks.

"The cold weather," he muttered, "makes the amber brittle. There must have been a flaw somewhere."

Long before Emmet had mentioned Birdseye Avenue, he had known the worst; but only then, when he remembered the two lovers whom he and Cardington had overtaken after the evening at Littleford's, did his emotion culminate in this unexpected expression. She had gone from his side, after he had made love to her and had taken the lilies of the valley he still cherished, to walk with her real lover, to congratulate him upon the triumph she had made her dupe describe. Now every incident connected with her fell into its proper place and appeared with its true meaning. He understood how he had been used from the first; the lurking figure by the fire in the woods was no longer a mystery; the scene on this very spot, when she had bent down to hand Emmet the candle, was explained. The whole story, in which he played the part of a meddler and a fool, was unrolled before him. Emmet — Emmet — Emmet — that had been her theme, and apparently her chief interest in life. Still, with a pitiful hope, he must needs have the final proof before believing. There was yet some remote possibility of a mistake, some question at least as to the extent of her infatuation for this man. He had spoken of two women. Perhaps Miss Wycliffe's abrupt departure was connected with a discovery of his unfaithfulness to her, and meant that she would cast him off forever. A wild hope that this might be so displaced his first despair. If that were all,— a mere ideal fancy which really did her credit,—perhaps she would return disillusioned, convinced of her mistake, and eager to bury its very memory forever.

He regained his seat, pale as a ghost, but with a wonderful effort he managed to smile.

Emmet reflected a moment. He had gone too far to retreat.

"Perhaps if her name were still Miss Wycliffe," he announced, "instead of Mrs. Emmet, it might be better for all concerned."

Only the semi-darkness of the place prevented him from seeing the effect of this disclosure. During the silence that ensued, the canvas of the windbreak flapped audibly, like the sail of a yacht responding to a rising breeze.

"You did n't expect that?" he demanded, gratified by the sensation he had created.

"No," Leigh heard himself reply, in a voice that sounded far away. "That makes it all the more — interesting. Then you were married secretly?"

"Not for two years or more; but we met from time to time. I can't help wondering now why nobody suspected the truth. Of course the boys chaffed me a good deal, and asked to be invited to the wedding, but they were miles short of guessing the real state of affairs. Sometimes I noticed her friends putting their heads together and knew they were discussing me, for they stopped whispering when I came up for their fares. But even so I heard casual remarks. Some said it was sweet of her—the way women talk, you know—and democratic, and others said it was no use trying to do anything for that kind of people."

"Mrs. Parr, for example?"

"Yes," Emmet burst out, his eyes flashing redly, "but I'll show that singed cat yet what kind of people I am! I'll show her and her whole damned set!" His anger almost choked him, and his face grew crimson. "She's part of the story, too," he went on, "but she does n't come in yet. However, if there were two people in Warwick that suspected anything serious, it was that woman and Professor Cardington."

"Not the bishop?" Leigh asked.

"I don't think so, though he did freeze me in that way of his that you can't put your finger on. He's as proud as Lucifer, and would as soon have thought of his daughter falling in love with some little Dago on the street as with me. But all the same, he did n't approve of her interest in me, and he managed to make it evident."

Leigh had a vision of the blow that awaited the bishop's pride. He even wondered whether the disclosure would kill him, but he made no comment. In his own heart a sense of anger deadened for the time being his sense of loss. Since his discovery of the fact that she was a married woman, her treatment of him appeared so much more heartless that he felt he could never forgive her.

"We were married in New York," Emmet explained. "It was in September. The bishop was off on a visitation; Mrs. Parr was in Europe. We met" —

"Never mind," Leigh interrupted, shrinking. "Tell me where the other woman comes in."

"That 's just what I 'm coming to now. When we got back to Warwick, — we did n't come together, you understand, — I found out for the first time what I was in for. That was when my troubles began."

"You don't speak as if you loved her," the other said harshly. Was it for this she had thrown herself away? Fortunately Emmet was too much absorbed in himself to note the suppressed scorn and fury of his voice.

"I did n't get much chance for love, or much love from her, either," he said bitterly. "She kept me just where I was before. What did I get? A stolen interview and a kiss now and then, but plenty of advice and books and plans. She put me up to running for mayor; I 'm bound to say that. But she was n't to acknowledge me as her husband until I was elected. That was the plan, and I was fool enough to agree to it. You would n't believe it, but I did n't see her sometimes for weeks together. Last winter she even sailed off to Europe as cool as a cucumber, and left me alone to work out my salvation, as she called it. I worked it out, too. I worked the union for all it was worth. I got to be president and formed a secret league with the other unions, and we captured the Democratic nomination before the opposition knew what we were up to. All that took time and work, and gave me something to think about besides my married life. But when I saw Felicity after that, it was mostly to report progress and to get advice. God! It was more like going to my teacher than to my wife, and the thing became intolerable. She grew more mysterious to me all the time. She did n't seem like a natural woman, and I could n't understand her at all. Then I met the other woman at a lodge dance. I took her home and kissed her at the gate, partly because she was a pretty girl, and partly because I thought she expected it. I thought that would be the end of it, but it was n't. You know how those things grow into something you did n't expect. You can understand how I got in deeper and deeper, intending to break away all the time. If you're the man I take you to be, you can't help understanding. You can't help seeing both sides of the question, and how I gradually got mixed with this girl without meaning any harm, until I discovered that we loved each other, and that my wife had kept me waiting till she had killed the love I once had for her, and the gratitude, too.

"The situation came to a head all at once. Just before the election, this girl goes to work for Felicity, and while there she wears a ring I let her have, which my wife had given me as a sort of kismet, or talisman, as she called it. Felicity sees it on her hand, follows her to her room, and gets it back, after having found out all she wanted to know, but without telling anything herself. Then, instead of coming to me after the election, she sent me a note to let me know that she had found me out, and off she went to Bermuda with her father."

"I see," said Leigh coldly, "but I don't see yet where I come in."

"I want your advice, as a friend," Emmet returned. He was still unsuspicious of anything amiss in his auditor, and went on to tell of the adventure that followed his good resolutions: of his race on the avenue; of his unexpected meeting with Lena and his sudden fall; of the encounter at the inn. Something of the eloquence which Leigh had heard from him on the platform glowed in the apologetic passages of his narrative. If the astronomer had never known and loved Felicity himself, he could not have failed to be impressed by the man's evident struggle; he would have appreciated his repentance; he would have blamed his wife for her conduct, and would have realised that her need of sympathy was less than Lena's in proportion as her love was less, in proportion as her resources and her pride were greater. As it was, he would have been more than human had he taken such a comprehensive view of the tragedy, and his judgment went bitterly against the man who had dared to esteem lightly the gift which he felt he would have given his all to possess.

"Now," Emmet said, in conclusion, "you 're a friend of mine and a friend of my wife's, and I thought — perhaps" —

"You want me to be a go-between?" Leigh demanded. "You want me to help you win her back?"

"That 's what I was thinking of," the mayor replied. "Tell her I mean to do the right thing, that I meant to all along. Somehow I think she 'll understand better if you tell her. You stand halfway between us, and can see both points of view. Now that I 'm mayor and established in life, the bishop need n't feel that he 'd be disgraced by the marriage. I can hold my own with the old gentleman now. She 's my wife, and I want her to acknowledge it. The account is pretty even as things stand, I take it."

Leigh smiled scornfully at Emmet's claim of social equality with the bishop, based upon his position as mayor. Not that office, but only the fact that he was Felicity's husband, would give him an entrance into the bishop's house, and the claim seemed to him boastful and vulgar. He rose abruptly to his feet, every muscle tense.

"No, I can't see both points of view," he said hoarsely. "I can see only her point of view, what she is, what she meant to do for you, what she gave you"—

"What she gave me!" Emmet echoed, springing to his feet in turn. "Hold on, professor. Be fair to a man. She gave me nothing that a wife should give, I tell you, nothing! She left me at the very door of the church and went off alone"—

"What!" Leigh cried. His revulsion of feeling was so great that he tottered and leaned against the wall for support. Only one thought possessed him, that she was not in reality this man's wife, after all. In the face of her desertion, the mere words of the marriage ceremony were as nothing.

"Why, man," he said, taking Emmet suddenly by the shoulder, as if he would shake a comprehension of his words into him, "you're not married, before God you're not married. What priestcraft notion has gotten hold of you? I tell you it's all a mistake. You've both made a mistake—and you've both found it out. Do you suppose, if she really loved you, she would have gone away like that, without giving you a chance to explain? If you really loved her, would you have kissed the first pretty girl that came in your way? I help you to win her back! Get her back yourself, if you can. I hope you can't do it. I don't wish you the luck you don't deserve. Don't come to me with your troubles!"

Emmet wrenched himself violently away and stood aghast.

"You love her yourself," he said, in a voice of wonder.

"And if I do," Leigh retorted defiantly, "what is that to you?"

"Nothing," Emmet answered, "nothing." And turning like one stupefied, he walked slowly away without another word.

CHAPTER XIII

FURNITURE AND FAMILY

IT was not without a painful self-consciousness that Leigh and Emmet met again after their strange interview on the tower. In a city of between fifty and one hundred thousand people, with comparatively few large arteries of trade, a chance encounter sooner or later was inevitable. It occurred one afternoon in a large crowd of Christmas shoppers. Either would have been glad of a forewarning and a chance to look casually in another direction, but neither was prepared, when they came face to face, to give the cut direct. Their greeting was scarcely more than a nod, and showed their mutual constraint. Leigh read in Emmet's bold eyes a warning such as an injured husband might convey to the man that had wronged him, and a defiant reassertion of himself after his humiliating confession. He suspected also, what indeed was the truth, that the discovery of his own feeling for the bishop's daughter had opened Emmet's eyes anew to her value, and had cleared them of the mists of passion for the unfortunate Lena Harpster. From now on the mayor would do his best to win his wife back. He had the bearing of one who had recovered his poise and meant to yield no inch of ground.

Leigh, absorbed in the impression he had received, was unconscious of the one he had given, of his somewhat repellent expression when he saw the mayor's square figure bearing down upon him. Yet his emotion was less personal and intense than the other's in proportion as he was less primitive by nature and training. He distinguished between Emmet the mayor and Emmet the lover; for he was familiar with the phenomenon of official probity combined with a lack of that quality in some personal relationship. Had Emmet's quandary been presented to him abstractly, he would have been quite tolerant in his judgement, with the understanding of a man of the world; but, in spite of resentment and chagrin, he still continued to love Felicity Wycliffe, and this fact made him scornful of the man who had trampled her gift under foot. But would Felicity continue to give?

Leigh believed that she had awakened from her delusion; but what direction would her pride now take? Would she continue in the course she had chosen in sheer perversity, in sheer fidelity to herself? There was also the attraction of extreme opposites to be reckoned with, the fascination which a man of simple psychology, of strength and wholesome good looks, might possess for a woman of great sublety and cultivation. Yet what could he do to prevent it? With what grace could he attempt to open her eyes to her husband's ulterior motives in seeking a reconciliation, now that she knew of his own love for her? Could he advise her to get a divorce on some technical ground, that she might marry the man who had opened her eyes to the truth? And how could he assume that to her he was an element in the situation?

After his first emotion in learning that she had never lived with her husband, and his consequent conviction that she regarded the marriage as a mistake, the ceremony itself loomed up as a grim fact, one not to be brushed aside by ingenious arguments. Behind it, as a prop to its stability, was the strict tradition of Christianity, an inheritance of peculiar influence with both the participants in the strange mistake. There was no cause for divorce which either of their respective churches recognised as valid; at least, so he believed, for he did not doubt that Emmet had told him the whole truth in regard to Lena Harpster, and he felt sure that he would now avoid the very appearance of evil. He recognised also that he was the recipient of a confession he must regard as sacred. Felicity must not know he shared her secret. His part must be merely that of a spectator of a drama.

These were his thoughts as he wandered from place to place, trying to convince himself that he had reached a point of renunciation; but as often as her face rose up before him he wavered in his resolution, and went back to the conviction that she really did not love the man who was only technically her husband. Might not her treatment of himself be capable of a more favourable interpretation than his first anger and chagrin had put upon it? He felt that it would depend upon her, when she returned, whether he could maintain a feigned indifference.

He purchased a pipe for Cardington, and ultimately found himself in a large department store turning over the volumes on the book counter in search of a gift for his father. Presently he heard a voice at his elbow.

"Are you engaged in Christmas shopping too, Mr. Leigh?"

He turned and saw Mrs. Parr looking at him tentatively, her hands full of bundles. A remembrance of his rudeness to her at Littleford's caused him to welcome this opportunity to make amends. She was Felicity's nearest friend, and perhaps she would mention her name. Moreover, the fact that Emmet suspected her of having divined his secret, and her meeting with him and Lena at the inn, gave her a new interest in his eyes.

"Yes, Mrs. Parr," he returned. "I'm doing as well as a mere man can be expected to do, which is n't very well. Perhaps you can come to my assistance."

She placed her bundles on the counter with alacrity, and her thin, gloved hand hovered over the rows of volumes.

"You must give me some hint as to the destination of the gift," she declared, turning upon him with a sparrow-like motion of the head and a significant smile.

"No," he said, laughing at her intimation, "it is n't what you suspect. I want a book for an old-fashioned gentleman, past middle life. There seems to be nothing here but the latest novels."

"As to that," she responded, "the bishop reads everything, from the Talmud to a Nick Carter detective story."

"Neither of the classics you mention will fit the present case, however."

"I know!" she cried. "'The Bible in Spain.' You need n't look dubious; it is n't a Sunday-school book, as you might think from the title. You may be sure that Felicity Wycliffe would n't like insipid literature, and this is one of her favourite books."

Leigh's dubious look had not been due to ignorance of the book, but to a doubt as to whether his father possessed it. On reflection, he thought the choice a safe one, and his reply left his adviser undisturbed in her conviction that she was admitting him into the select circle of Borrovians.

"The recommendation goes," he said. "Not," he corrected himself, "that I would not have purchased it upon yours alone, Mrs. Parr."

"Oh, I'm not vain of my knowledge of books," she assured him. "Miss Wycliffe is my literary conscience. I do miss her so much! When she's away, I'm only half a person, I declare; and when she's here, I'm just nobody at all, because I lose myself in her."

"You make the friendships of men pale into insignificance," he remarked jestingly, yet not without a new respect, inspired by this glimpse of her capacity for loyalty to one who overshadowed her.

"If you only knew her!" she said. "But you don't."

He could not help wondering which of them knew the more about one great incident in her life, but he merely echoed her words with a rueful conviction of his own: "No, I don't."

She regarded him with sympathetic understanding. Of course he was infatuated with Felicity, like many others, and undoubtedly his chances were as remote as theirs.

"Now tell me," she said, "what you are going to get for the rest of your family."

"That's what I want you to tell me," he answered.

"Follow me, then," she said brightly, "and I'll see that you don't get imposed upon."

He took the book and her bundles, and they left the counter on the best of terms. Though he was hopelessly in love with another, a knowledge of Mrs. Parr's partiality for him lent a certain charm to his manner. Without attaching any weight to the fancy Miss Wycliffe had told him of, he was sufficiently human to enjoy being liked and to make some response. At his first meeting with Mrs. Parr she had seemed merely insignificant; at Littleford's he had found her irritating; now, to his astonishment, he discovered in her worship of Felicity her attractive side. When they finally left the shop with their accumulated purchases, she insisted that he follow her into the sleigh and go to her home for a cup of tea.

"People are so inconsiderate during the Christmas season," she chattered. "Now I never have my things sent home at this time of year, when the delivery men are so overworked; and I don't even bother the boys to carry them out to the sleigh for me, unless I positively have to. John and I do our shopping together, don't we, John?"

The coachman touched his hat with his whip in acknowledgement of the copartnership in humanitarianism, and deftly steered his horses into the open street. "I belong to a league of women," she went on, "who have agreed not to go shopping in the late afternoons, and not to have the things they can carry sent by the delivery waggons. I don't know how many printed slips I have sent out requesting shoppers to use the same consideration. We looked up nearly every name in the directory. This is the third year we 've done it."

"That 's why I did n't receive a copy of your communication," he remarked. "My name 's not in the directory yet."

"You would n't believe what fun Felicity always makes of us," she said. "She pretends that we are trying to excuse people from doing what they are paid to do."

He was able to see how the virtue of the league could appeal to Felicity's sense of humour, even though she might accept its suggestion.

"There 's that man!" she cried, suddenly stiffening. "It seems to me I can never go down-town without meeting the horrid creature somewhere, strutting along as if he owned the town, just because a lot of ruffians have made him mayor. But I believe Felicity has won you over to her strange point of view."

"Emmet is n't at all a bad mayor," he returned. "I happen to know that he has refused to have anything to do with Bat Quayle, the political boss of the worst element of his party. What do you say to that?"

"That you have been misinformed," she answered implacably, "or that he has gone back on his word, and now refuses to pay his political debts."

"In either case you don't leave him a leg to stand on. Still, I can only reiterate my conviction in regard to his political honesty, and wait for developments."

"I notice you don't make any claims for his private character," she retorted, giving him a severe glance. "But men have their own code of morals, and always stand by each other. Now I happen to know that he is running around with one of Felicity's servants. Out at the Old Continental, the other evening, we found them in possession of a room we had engaged for dinner. He practically ordered us out of the place until he and Miss Harpster, as he called her, chose to take their departure. Did you ever hear of such a thing in your life?"

"Never," he answered. "Emmet would be quite a catch for her, would n't he?"

She threw up her hands with a gesture of infinite scorn. "He never in this world intends to marry her. I 'm sure of that."

He wondered whether she guessed how truly she had spoken, but her face was sphinx-like in its hard acerbity. She seemed to shrink and grow pinched with the intensity of her emotion, and her next words, spoken almost as a soliloquy, showed the trend of her thoughts.

"I had n't quite made up my mind to write to Felicity yet, but now I will, this very night. She ought not to let such a girl stay in the house. But I 'm afraid my writing will only make her determined — she 's so perverse."

The words only completed his mystification. It now occurred to him that this might be merely the excessive virtue of a New Englander, that Mrs. Parr merely wished to save her friend from the mortification of a scandal belowstairs in her house. Her prejudice against Emmet was sufficient to explain her belief in his bad intentions regarding Lena Harpster.

"On second thoughts I sha'n't do it," she declared, with a curious gleam in her eyes; then she closed her lips firmly, as if to dismiss the subject.

Leigh could only guess why she had changed her mind, and had suddenly decided to let matters take their course. Assuming that she knew nothing of Emmet's true relationship with Felicity and thought merely that her friend was infatuated with him, it was possible that she might even welcome a moral breakdown on Emmet's part, provided it would open Felicity's eyes to his true quality. He was tempted to believe that Mrs. Parr would willingly let Lena be sacrificed to accomplish this result. The various possibilities that lay concealed behind his companion's enigmatical features were bewildering, and the subject was too delicate for further probing. As the fine vista of Birdseye Avenue opened up before them, he turned the subject by remarking that Christmas never seemed so truly Christmas as in New England. The dictum was a happy one.

"Yes," she assented with fervour, "and is n't Warwick beautiful? I never go away, even to Europe, without realising when I come back that Warwick is the most beautiful place in the world.

Thank God, I was born and brought up in New England!"

"And thank God, I was n't!" he retorted.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded, turning upon him with shocked asperity.

"I merely mean that my view would have been limited for life to the vista that may be obtained from the steps of the First Church — not that it is n't a fine one, in its way."

The genial banter of his tone softened her resentment to curiosity.

"Where in Heaven's name were you brought up?" she asked.

"Let me see. An account of my peregrinations would read like a list of most of the States of the Union. One gets an idea of the country by such a nomadic existence, and does n't make the mistake of supposing that the tail wags the dog, instead of the dog wagging the tail."

"I suppose you mean to imply that New England is the tail," she said with trembling intensity, "when every one knows it's the head and brains of the country. I've never been west of Niagara Falls, and I'm proud of it."

"You have reason to be," he replied with gravity. "I was only testing your loyalty. Where is our Mecca of patriotism and literature, if it is n't New England? My remark about the New England Christmas was suggested by a memory of 'Snow-

Bound,' which was one of the classics of my youth, when I used to look out discontentedly upon our inferior Western brand of snow."

"I can't make you out," she said.

When they entered the house, she laid aside her wraps and gave him a cup of tea, supplemented by the thinnest of thin wafers, after which she conducted him from room to room on a tour of inspection.

"Are you interested in Colonial furniture?" she questioned.

"I'm anxious to learn enough about it to get interested," he assured her. "I see you have a great deal of it here."

"A great many people have," she answered. "It's easy enough to pick up imitations in the second-hand shops, or to ransack country houses; but these pieces are all genuine and have been in the family for generations. There are three Chippendales that belonged to my grandfather on my mother's side, Colonel Styles, and this is a Sheraton. That mahogany table with the low-hanging leaves is a genuine Pembroke. Do you see that newel-post? It's the only thing in the house we did n't inherit. We got it from the old Putney mansion when they were tearing it down to make room for the library. When I heard they were destroying the house, I sent Mr. Parr there to see what he could pick up, and he found this beautiful thing thrown in the corner, as if it had no value at all. Think of it!"

Leigh owned that it was a prize of no small value.

"You may say so," she went on, warming to the subject, "and it cost us twenty-five dollars. When they found out we wanted it, they put up the price. Mrs. Bradford has never gotten over it that we stole a march on her, for she meant to get it herself. Do you know Mrs. Bradford?"

"Miss Wycliffe made me acquainted with her at Littleford's. I remember hearing that she was prominent in the First Church and very much interested in historical relics."

"Her husband is one of the Bradfords," with an emphasis on the definite article, "descended from Governor Bradford, and she is president of the Society for the Preservation of Colonial Landmarks, and also of the Daughters."

"The Daughters of the King?" he inquired maliciously.

"The Daughters of the American Revolution," she corrected.

"I did n't know," he explained; "I used to hear of the other 'daughters' from an aunt of mine; but her chief hobby was bishops."

"The Episcopalians are in a small minority here," she informed him. "Most of the old families go to the First Church. I was brought up there, but Miss Wycliffe has made me a kind of half Episcopalian, so that I go to St. George's sometimes with her. But speaking of the Bradfords, you have no idea how many obscure people claim to be descended from Governor Bradford. Now, I am a genuine Bradford on my father's side."

"The old governor must have been the Adam of these parts," he commented.

She picked up a volume from a near-by table. "This is the real Bradford genealogy," she announced.

They continued their progress through the house, viewing hautboys, and clocks, and tables, and tapestries, and chairs. Leigh had extracted all the amusement for himself that the subject and the narrator could offer, and he began to grow inattentive. The long roll of names and of styles of furniture, hitherto unfamiliar, confused him, and the constant reiteration of the local point of view seemed an almost incredible provincialism. When they returned at last to the drawing-room, Mr. Parr, just returned from his office, rose to greet him.

"And how do you like Warwick?" he demanded. "You show your good taste," he approved, when Leigh had complimented the beauty of the city, "and Warwick is a very cultivated place as well. Have n't you found it so? There are a great many rich people here, but you see no display of wealth, as in New York."

"I hate New York," his wife put in. "It's so frightfully commercial."

Mr. Parr, having delivered himself of the articles of his belief, resumed his rôle as the silent partner of the house. He was a large, slow man, whose history seemed to be the history of the dinners he had eaten. In his eyes smouldered a dull glow, as of resentment at the limits of the human stomach and the volubility of wives. He woke up as his visitor prepared to depart, to inform him that the thermometer had registered twenty degrees of frost that morning, and to express the conviction that Warwick would spoil him for residence hereafter in any other city. Leigh assured him that there was no doubt of it, and went out into the winter twilight, homesick for the full, crude life of the Middle West, for the picturesque civilisation of California, for the smoke and splendour and roar of New York.

As he passed the bishop's darkened house, he felt that it was out of the question for him to spend the Christmas recess in the deserted college on the hill. He resolved to run away from himself, to seek distraction from the riddle of his existence by a visit to the metropolis, to change his sky in the hope of changing his mind. The increasing cold, and the dun canopy of cloud that had overspread the sky for days, convinced him of the futility of attempting to continue his observations at present. Tomorrow he would join in the general hegira from the Hall.

He walked back to the college, and seeing a light in Cardington's room, he knocked at the door. His friend was seated in the chair he never seemed to leave.

"Ah," he said, observing his visitor's bundles, "you come in like a Santa Claus coadjutor, a youthful Santa Claus, not yet dignified by that hirsute appendage to the chin without which no Santa Claus is complete."

Leigh admitted that he was a feeble imitation, and produced the briar-wood pipe from his pocket. Cardington was greatly pleased.

"Thank you," he said; "thank you. I shall break the amber stem, sooner or later, but I shall have it replaced by one of vulcanised rubber, and shall continue to cherish the gift though *mutatus ab illo*. If you don't mind, I'll initiate it now, without waiting for Christmas day." He suited the action to the words and leaned back in his chair, puffing. "A new pipe is like — a new pair of shoes — necessary — inevitable — but it must be broken in. I see promise already of sweetness — great sweetness — in this briar."

"Mrs. Parr picked me up and took me home for a cup of tea," Leigh said. "And there I met Mr. Parr."

"Well, and how did you enjoy our excellent friends, the Parrs?" Cardington queried, leaning back in his chair with an expectant twinkle in his eyes.

"I felt that I was visiting a storage warehouse filled with old furniture, in the midst of which stood Parr like a wax figure escaped from the Eden Musée."

"I can well understand that," Cardington commented, with a chuckle. "And you learned something, doubtless, about the old newel-post that was taken from the Putney mansion, which I hope you admired adequately, about the old clock, the tables, and the chairs. You heard the respectable names also of the respectable Parrs' ancestors, and Mr. Parr asked you how you liked Warwick, after which he told you how he liked it himself."

"Your astral body must have accompanied me," Leigh suggested.

"I could report the conversation verbatim," Cardington declared. "She told you, among other things, that she was a genuine Bradford on her father's side, and uttered bulls of excommunication against pretenders to the honour. It would n't do, you know, to admit that the Bradford progeny is as numerous as the stars for multitude, and as the sands upon the seashore. It is advisable to restrict the genuine Bradfords to those of wealth and position. Now, this genealogical mania is a kind of midsummer madness that lasts in Warwick the year through, a lineal descendant, so to speak, of the witchcraft delusion; but it offers a certain kind of mental pemmican to impoverished minds. Those much vaunted ancestors were very worthy people, but, bless you! there was n't a social swell in the whole lot."

"Out West one never hears of such things," said Leigh.

"Out West," Cardington returned, "they are still grappling with the realities of life. Ancestor worship has not yet set in as a canker in the fruit; that will come with the dead ripeness. Here you see the New Englander as he is to-day, not as he was in a glorified past; not landing at Plymouth Rock, not hanging witches, or beating Quakers, or persecuting Episcopalians, not throwing tea into Boston Harbour, or writing philosophy at Concord, but spending his days in watching the gradual accretion of his already substantial fortune.

"A New Englander is the only jewel that appears to better advantage out of its proper setting than in it. To illustrate. In the West, the New Englander is thawed without being melted to such an extent as to lose his backbone; he becomes genial without undue compromise; he carries the torch of civilisation without a flourish. It was the chosen spirits of New England, men and women, that went West in their great waggons with the pots and pans hanging from the axle, and salted that crude country with their quality.

"But the conversation has become very oracular," he continued. "What are you going to do during the recess?"

"I'm going home, and shall stop over in New York for a visit on my way back. But where are you going?"

"Well, I may take a little run down to Bermuda and see the bishop and Miss Felicity. Just think of leaving all this ice and snow, and about the second day out beginning to shed your superfluous outer garments, until you arrive at your destination in white duck trousers and a Panama hat! Think of the odour of lilies, not to mention the onions! And there I shall find Miss Felicity, looking like the goddess Flora, wandering in those beautiful lily-fields that command a wide sweep of the purple sea. It's enough to stir one to poetry, is n't it?"

"I wish I might go with you," Leigh remarked.

A film seemed to come over Cardington's blue eyes, just the suggestion of a veil of secrecy.

"Yes — yes — if you had n't made other plans, you know. But you must go down there some winter, you must indeed. It's really a most charming place."

"Well," Leigh said, rising and taking up his bundles, "give the bishop and Miss Wycliffe my regards."

"I will," Cardington promised. "Perhaps they will return with me. I'll take your excellent pipe along to smoke on the Gulf Stream and among the lilies. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRESIDENT TAKES A HAND

ONE evening late in January, Leigh entered Cardington's room with his post-prandial pipe still burning.

"What do you say," he demanded, "to going down to the opera house to hear the President of the United States speak? Here I've been shut up all day, and forgot what was going on till I picked up the paper just now. I'm ripe for some excitement, the mood which in my undergraduate days would have tempted me to go out and paint the town." He threw himself into a chair, looked about with a sense of being at home, and passed his fingers wearily through the disordered masses of his hair.

The other looked at him attentively. "You make a great mistake," he remarked, "in allowing yourself to get out of condition. With a reasonable regard to the laws of health, you could keep yourself looking like the discus-thrower, thinly disguised in modern habiliments." He spoke like an impersonal judge, who appreciates the excellence of a type and wishes to see it maintained.

Leigh laughed with some bitterness. "You remember what the German professor said to his American student when he wished to take a rest. 'Who ever heard of a real mathematician with any health?'"

"Ah, yes," Cardington returned, with a comprehending look in his eyes, "but I'm afraid you had too good a time down there in New York, and that now you're working too hard by way of penance. But in regard to your suggestion, I am inclined to think favourably of it. Not that the President *per se* is an object of great interest to me. His mental processes are tolerably familiar, and I don't feel particularly in need of instruction concerning my duty toward God and my duty toward my neighbour. Still, this is an occasion of more than usual interest, as perhaps you are aware."

A change had come into the relationship of these two, or rather a readjustment of the view of the younger man concerning the older, dating from the time when Cardington had disposed so neatly of his tentative wish to accompany him to Bermuda. He had returned from the South alone about a fortnight before, quite uncommunicative in regard to his trip, merely saying that the Wycliffes would come by a later boat. The shadow of the woman in the case was undoubtedly between them, and yet it could not be said that jealousy, in the ordinary sense of the word, was operative as an estranging element. Leigh had too much reason to know that neither of them had much chance of winning her, and he thought he divined in Cardington not so much a lover's interest as a friend's deep concern on her behalf and an unwillingness to mention her name in casual conversation.

Upon the present occasion Leigh was impressed with his air of subdued excitement, with a hint of tension and expectancy, as if something untoward were about to happen; and as they took their way toward the city together, the reason of this mood became apparent.

"Now, you know," he began, "great things were happening this afternoon, and as I sometimes like to view history in the making, I went out to see what I could see. I 'm afraid that our respected mayor is destined to play a very inconspicuous rôle in this evening's entertainment. If I am correctly informed, he is not to have a speaking part. As an accidental mayor, pitchforked into his present position by Fortune in one of her ironical moods, he is to be allowed merely a seat on the platform, where he may be seen but not heard. But to go back to the beginning. When it was learned that the President of the United States intended to honour us with a visit and to stand and deliver a speech, it occurred to a group of representative citizens that a professional baseball player and street-car conductor was scarcely a fit person to receive so distinguished a guest; so they very properly resolved that his part in the exercises should be reduced to a minimum. To that end a committee, including among others Mr. Bradford, Mr. Parr, and our worthy alumnus, Mr. Cobbens, wrote a letter to Emmet in which they suggested that his speech of welcome at the station be limited to three, or at the most to five, minutes. They intimated also that after the speech of welcome was concluded, Mr. Emmet need not concern himself further in the entertainment of the President."

"I call that beastly snobbishness," said Leigh indignantly. "Whatever the man's former position may have been, he is now the mayor and entitled to all the honours of his office. On the same principle, the swells of forty years ago might have refused to recognise Lincoln as the President because he once split rails. And in fact they practically did. He had to be dead before they began to think that his rise in the world was a vindication of the equality of opportunity they pretended to believe in."

"'Beastly' is perhaps the proper adjective under the circumstances," the other admitted, "but why should we lose sleep and shorten our days with fruitless indignation because men of a certain kind act as men of that kind always have acted? I prefer to look at the dramatic and humorous side of it, having, perhaps unfortunately, reached the speculative and acquiescent time of life. And the situation at the station was not without its amusing aspect. Mr. Emmet's well-known oratorical powers being thus curtailed, the President was delayed but a few minutes and then conducted to a carriage and driven about the city, attended by the honourable trio before mentioned. It is said by those who were within earshot that the President inquired for his friend the mayor, when he saw that he was to be deprived of his company. However that may be, I myself saw our tribune of the people riding by himself in solitary grandeur in the third carriage."

At the memory of Emmet's discomfiture he interrupted his story to indulge in one of his silent laughs, an expression of mirth which, to his listener's excited mind, seemed almost an inhuman exhibition of his professed detachment from the passions about him. Perhaps, had he seen the dapper Cobbens and the lethargic Parr escorting the unsuspicious President to the carriage, and Emmet's expression as he found himself shoved into the third place in the procession, he might have appreciated his companion's sense of the ridiculous. But it was the inward struggle, not the outward aspect, that stirred his emotions. Emmet's most bitter strictures upon Cobbens and his kind were justified by this incident, and he imagined the mayor's sensations when he found himself outgeneralled and humiliated. What would Felicity have felt, had she been present to witness the scene? How it might have affected her toward her husband, whether it would have aroused her to champion him the more, or whether it would have moved her to scorn of his stupidity in allowing himself to be put aside, Leigh could only guess; but his own instinct was to make common cause with the man that was wronged.

"And who appointed the committee," he inquired, "if Emmet had nothing to do with it?"

"Why, they appointed themselves, without any more regard for the mayor than if he had been a professor in St. George's Hall. Now perhaps you begin to appreciate why I remarked that this was an occasion of more than ordinary interest. Can we doubt that word has gone round among the proletariat that their mayor has been insulted, and can we doubt that they will be at the opera house in full force to express their opinion of the committee? You see now my motive in coming. I am like the man that went to the animal show in the hope of seeing the lion eat the trainer. In other words, if the people are going to give us a specimen of the psychology of the mob, I wish to be there to enjoy it. Such a thing might help one to an appreciation of certain incidents in Roman history, like the turmoils in the time of the Gracchi, and the scene in the forum when Mark Antony played on the heartstrings of the populace. Everything is grist that comes to our mill. Even a football game is a modern rendition of a gladiatorial combat. Don't you think so?"

When they reached the edge of the great throng that already filled the street in front of the opera house, Cardington, instead of plunging into it as his companion had anticipated, turned down an alley, like one familiar with the locality, and led the way to the stage door. The manœuvre disclosed to Leigh the fact that his colleague had intended all the time to come, and also his own good fortune in obtaining such a guide.

"Pass right in, professor," one of the guard said, as soon as he caught sight of Cardington's tall figure. "A friend of yours? All right. Sergeant, these are two friends of mine."

They made their way behind the scenes and came down into the pit, where a few people, similarly favoured, were slowly selecting their seats.

"What kind of a pull have you got with these fellows?" Leigh asked, secretly amused at the surprise his companion had reserved for him.

"A prophet is not always without honour, even in his own country," Cardington returned evasively.

Apparently his vein of talk was worked out to the end, for he fell into a profound silence as soon as he had taken his seat, his arms folded and his head bent forward, like one oblivious of his surroundings.

Leigh, not sorry to be left to his own thoughts and observations, listened to the roar of the increasing multitude in the corridor without. He was struck by an absence of that good humour which usually characterises such a gathering. From time to time the doors creaked and bulged inward as the people surged against them, clamouring menacingly for admittance. Each repetition of the forward movement was followed by an accentuated babel of voices: women screaming that they were being crushed and shrilly demanding more room, men protesting that they themselves were powerless to resist the pressure from behind. It was evident that Cardington had not miscalculated their animus, for they hurled maledictions at the janitor, who stood waiting within, his watch in his hand, wavering between fear for the stability of the bolts and an unwillingness to disobey orders. Those already admitted listened with increasing uneasiness, momentarily anticipating that the doors would give way with a crash, and that they might see men and women trampled under foot in an irresistible stampede.

Every electric light in the place was now turned on, disclosing the bare tiers of seats, the stage filled with chairs, the great flags looped on either side of the national shield, the speaker's table surmounted by a glass and pitcher. Then the scene changed. The janitor, struggling to open the doors, was thrown violently aside as they swung back and launched the mob into the hall. A great roar ascended to the roof; the nearer seats were submerged by the black mass, which sent out thin streams between the rows, like an advancing tide creeping shoreward between ledges of rock. Leigh and Cardington rose to their feet and stood gazing at the spectacle. For the most part the crowd was composed of labouring men, who looked as if they had just come from the factory or the shop, but here and there could be seen a glimpse of bright ribbon, or a feather, or the silk hat of a pale-faced clerk. So rapid was the movement that the two spectators were forced to resume their seats in a few minutes to forestall their seizure.

It was eight o'clock, the time set for the appearance of the President, when Mayor Emmet came from one of the wings, entirely alone, and took a chair near the centre of the stage. He had not been invited to meet the President at dinner, and while the great man and his entertainers lingered over their cigars, the mayor appeared promptly in the opera house, as if keeping a business engagement. No one who listened to the welcome he received could doubt his personal popularity or the intensity with which his constituents resented the slight he had endured. At first he sat facing the tumult imperturbably, and then a smile slowly mounted to his eyes, as he rose and bowed his acknowledgements. Demands for a speech were shot out at him from various parts of the pit, but he merely shook his head and indicated his refusal by a familiar yet graceful gesture.

Cardington sat gazing at the solitary figure, muttering half inarticulate strictures upon the demagogical spirit that had led the man to make such an open bid for sympathy and vindication, but his companion experienced very different emotions. There sat Felicity's husband, handsome, self-contained, and effective. With a rueful appreciation of a type that differed so much from his own, the astronomer wondered whether she could resist him now, were she there to witness his triumph. The difference in social station between her and her husband seemed unimportant now. What he lacked was easy to acquire compared with what he had already won; and his weakness for Lena Harpster was, after all, much less serious than the moral delinquencies of the men of Felicity's own class. For Warwick, like all rich cities, was honeycombed with social scandals, and scarcely one of Emmet's opponents would have been justified, if all were published, in casting the first stone at him. Surely, Leigh reflected, she must know these facts, for even he, a comparative stranger, had heard of them.

Was her pride so exacting that she demanded perfection in return for her condescension? Would she make no allowances whatever? It seemed to Leigh that such an attitude on her part would be inhuman. During his visit to New York he had recovered his grip upon himself, for he was not one to throw away his days like the petals of a discarded flower because he had failed to win the woman he loved. Love, he reminded himself bitterly, was not the main business of life. This mood of renunciation gave him an almost impersonal appreciation of his successful rival; but the tribute left him heartsick. Like all personally ambitious men who have failed of popular applause, the success of another filled him with momentary self-depreciation. To be sure, this popular triumph of Emmet was fleeting and local, while he himself meant yet to win a permanent, though restricted, fame. Of this he had no doubt. The present scene stirred him to grim emulation. To-morrow he would realise that shouting and the clapping of hands are as transient as the wind in the trees; but to-night they were, after all, something well worth winning.

Presently, as if a play previously rehearsed were being acted before the eyes of the audience, the "prominent representatives" of the city and state began to swarm out from the wings and fill the chairs. Senators, judges, millionaires, popular preachers, all sunk to the dead level of a supporting chorus, an impressive illustration of the littleness of the locally great. To all those thousands of intent eyes these were merely the background upon which, in another moment, was to be projected the one figure of national importance.

And now he was standing before them, instantly recognisable, though his appearance magically bettered expectation. The committee, virtuously true to the course of action they had planned, had passed Emmet by without a look, but the people surged to their feet and cheered, as they saw the President pause and take their mayor by the hand. The two stood in front of the passing chorus, apparently chatting like old friends, and as the audience caught sight of the President's famous smile, they laughed aloud. Even those who might later call the President's action shrewd politics now felt that it was dictated by unaffected humanity, and their carefully nursed attitude of criticism melted for the time in the warmth of that solvent personality.

As the confusion began to subside, while the observed and the observers resumed their seats, Leigh suddenly saw Bishop Wycliffe sitting beside the local bishop of the Roman Catholic Church. The proximity of the two men, the easy courtesy of their manner as they exchanged a whispered remark and turned again to glance at the President, stirred Cardington to comment.

"That 's a touching picture of Christian charity," he murmured, with a gleam of amusement in his eyes, "our Anglican and Latin ecclesiastical princes side by side, forgetful of the Eve of St. Bartholomew and of Henry VIII. I have n't the slightest doubt that they are more conscious at this moment of those very things and of their respective traditions than of the situation before them."

His companion, looking for the bishop's daughter, scarcely heard what he said. He discovered her in a box at one side of the stage, in the midst of her friends, and was not surprised at the studied unconcern of her manner. She must have come prepared to play her part. It was her beauty only that surprised him. His mental picture of her was pale compared with the glowing reality, for she seemed to have brought with her all the warmth and colour of the south. Though her eyes were turned in Emmet's direction, the casual observer might naturally have supposed that the President, sitting in the same line of vision, was the object of her interest. Only Leigh, glancing from one to the other, saw her falter slightly as she encountered her husband's fixed and meaning look. There was a determination in his aspect that shook ever her fortified resolve. The colour slowly mounted in his face, and his cheek pulsed with emotion. As her gaze fluttered away, he turned himself in his chair with a decisive motion, like one who bides his time, and sat looking upon vacancy. He seemed to forget the scene before him and his own position between the warring forces so dramatically brought together.

The silence of expectancy that had fallen upon the house was pierced by a low hissing sound, for Anthony Cobbens had risen to his feet and advanced to the footlights to make the speech of introduction. As the malignant greeting reached his ears, his face paled and his fingers tightened on the rim of the silk hat which he held awkwardly in the bend of his arm. The scene Cardington had anticipated was about to be enacted. Upon Cobbens, as the mouthpiece of the committee, the fury of the people now turned itself, a fury no less intense because restrained to some extent by the presence of the President. Perhaps the unfortunate spokesman had thought that this presence would save him entirely, for his reception seemed to turn him to stone. As he waited for the hissing to subside, he presented an appearance at once so grotesque and pitiful that his bitterest enemy must needs have felt some twinges of compassion. That tight-waisted and wide-skirted coat, those faultless trousers, served only to give a waspish effect, and to emphasize the insignificance of the figure they were meant to dignify. He wore a solitary pink carnation, selected with solicitous care. His thin face seemed to shrivel under the fierce rays of scorn concentrating from thousands of eyes, and his large, bald crown began to glisten with slow drops of sweat. Even his voice, when he was permitted to speak, had lost its timbre and suggested the voice of a somnambulist.

It was evident that he had prepared a long and elaborate address, for presently in the monotonous mumble of his words familiar phrases began to reach the ears of those who listened,—"when police commissioner of New York"—"the Rough riders"—"San Juan Hill,"—but for once their conjuring power was gone, and they were greeted in silence or drowned in mocking catcalls. Not one in ten of his audience knew or cared what he was saying; not one in a thousand was moved to pity for his plight. The people had been visited with scorn that day through an insult to their elected representative, and now they paid it back with interest. The lion was eating his trainer, and licking his chops with grim satisfaction. The spirit was that of class against class, bitter, ugly, and revengeful.

Leigh's personal interest was supplemented by the curiosity of a comparative stranger, who drinks in every detail of a situation typical of the country in which he has come to dwell. He studied the various faces on the platform attentively, and wondered whether Judge Swigart were now convinced of the existence of the class feeling which he had so blandly belittled in the joint debate; but the defeated candidate, like the majority of his companions, had assumed a studied and enigmatic expression. So great was the tension that no one ventured to look at his neighbour. In a way they were all sharers in the humiliation of Cobbens, and co-recipients of the people's scorn. He saw Felicity and Mrs. Parr putting their heads together in whispered comment. The bishop stirred uneasily and glanced with irritation at the speaker's back, as if he would fain have bid him make an end. In a moment of pardonable weakness the mayor's lips parted in the briefest of smiles. Then he took out his handkerchief to conceal his emotion, and having propped his chin upon the palm of his hand, he gazed abstractedly at the floor.

The President, twitching in his chair, appeared well-nigh unable to control his nervousness. He grasped the arms of his seat convulsively, he polished his glasses, he screwed up his eyes, he smiled, he frowned. Watching him with intense interest, Leigh entirely forgot the speaker. He had not imagined the President's build so powerful. There was a brute strength in the neck and shoulders that would have been no inadequate endowment for a pugilist; yet this suggestion was offset by an expression of which his pictures had given scarcely a hint. It was not difficult to understand how his enthusiastic biographer had been carried away by that probity and sweetness, so that he made both himself and his hero ridiculous and aroused inextinguishable laughter among the arbiters of good taste. The subject was one that tempted men to violent opinions on one side or the other.

Meanwhile the speech continued, but now the listeners began to appreciate a curious change in the temper of the speaker and of his tormentors. At first he had stood before them like one hypnotised, unable to save himself by shortening the oration he had prepared. By little and little, however, the innate power of the man asserted itself, malign and hateful as ever, but no less surely effective. His eyes began to glisten, his voice gained in volume and steadiness. He gradually made himself heard more continuously, until the hissing and catcalls became less frequent, and finally ceased. After a struggle of fifteen minutes, he finished strong. Like some ill-favoured terrier, he had persisted in spite of odds, and had worried his great antagonist into wondering submission.

When his figure disappeared from view, to be replaced by that of the President, his supporters exchanged sidelong glances and meaning smiles. They had chosen their champion well, a nasty fighter, to crack the whip over the class from which he had risen.

It was now that the President increased to passionate devotion the popularity his attitude thus far had won him. As he heard Emmet's name combined with his own in the cheering, his face lightened up with his extraordinary and spontaneous smile. He turned, and pulled Emmet to his feet beside him; then he sat down and looked on with keen enjoyment while the mayor bowed his thanks. It was some time before the demonstration ceased and the people, satisfied and vindicated, settled down to listen.

But the President evidently had a score of his own to settle, and a snub to administer. He turned to the senior Senator who sat at the far left of the stage and thanked him for his welcome to the State; then he turned to Mayor Emmet and thanked him for his welcome to the city. There was not one word of reply to the ill-starred Cobbens, not one syllable in appreciation of the efforts of the committee. He had taken his manuscript from his pocket and laid it on the table before the full meaning of this omission dawned upon the audience, and then they broke loose with an animus which made their previous demonstrations seem comparatively mild. The President gathered his manuscript together, raised his hand for silence, and began to read.

His speech was simple in content and devoid of imaginative passages; his delivery was conspicuously defective; his voice, uneven in quality, now low, now breaking into a shrill note, seemed to come forth only at the bidding of a tremendous will. Every word appeared to necessitate an effort and to be ground out between clenched teeth. Yet his listeners hung on every word with breathless attention. His smile broke forth, and they found it irresistible; he grew serious, and they reflected his mood; he made a patriotic appeal, and the response was instant. Without any of the arts of the orator, he swayed them as he would. It was the triumph of personality over art. The ugly memories of the recent scene faded away; local struggles were forgotten; Emmet and Cobbens receded equally into the background, and only the country's glory and interests filled the minds of the listeners.

During all this time the bishop's daughter sat as one rapt in a reverie that had little connection with the emotions that swayed the crowded house before her. Emmet made no further attempt to look at her, and to do so would have necessitated a conspicuous movement and turning; but the young mathematician gazed in her direction from time to time, wondering at the nature of her thoughts, and hoping that their eyes might meet. As often before, he noted that her expression in repose suggested a profound sadness, as if her beauty had brought its heritage of unrest. There is a type of beauty that suggests a setting of fashion and clothes and jewelry; but Felicity's loveliness was of the twilight kind, far removed from realism, setting the imagination free with fancies of the mountains and the woods. To the man who loved her and had seen her in just such a setting, the appeal was all the more powerful. Even now the shadows of the trees seemed to lurk in her eyes, in her hair, and in the exquisite curve of her lips. It was difficult for him to realise that she was a fashionable woman, loving the opportunities of her social life, for he saw her otherwise. Hers was a face toward which men gravitated, not drawn by her beauty alone, nor by the brilliancy of her mind, but by a sense of mystery beyond the outward seeming.

The atmosphere which the President's speech had created outlasted the effort itself, and remained warmly in the minds of the hearers. All too soon they were reaching for their hats and coats and beginning to realise that the great occasion was over. Soon the stage was bare, and the receding tide in the pit had left large patches of empty seats.

The experience had wrought a wonderful transformation in Leigh. Emmet's initial triumph and his claims were now forgotten. Had the mayor been allowed to speak, he would doubtless have scored a hit, but Cobbens had succeeded in reducing him to a mere pawn. The people had thrust him forward on the board; Cobbens had neatly lifted him off and usurped his square. The mayor's position had been far from heroic, battered between contending forces and finally rescued by the President's strong arm. Doubtless Cobbens had killed himself politically, but he had won a certain kind of victory. Emmet was already beaten when he failed to grasp the opportunity the President's visit presented and allowed the committee to thrust him aside. No amount of subsequent championing could restore him to a position of dignity. His enemies had decided that he must not be allowed to introduce the President, for they knew he would do it well. They had brought the fury of the people down upon their heads, but they had exhibited their chosen representative before them in a mute and inglorious rôle. They had even succeeded in making him an object of pity. The damage he had received in the imagination of his supporters was incalculable, and while they burned with indignation, they instinctively paid a treacherous tribute to Cobbens's amazing cleverness and audacity.

Though no such tribute was paid the lawyer by Leigh, it was still true that the turn of affairs forced Emmet from his consideration until, instead of a star of the first magnitude, he became a mere point of light, and finally disappeared. During the President's speech, he felt that he had been holding secret communion with Felicity, and the accumulated excitement of the evening worked in his thoughts an unexpected license and daring. It was possible to allow Emmet's claims when he was receiving the homage of the people alone, and she had not yet appeared; but her presence had revived the old passionate torment in his heart. Love returned triumphant, making light of all other claims and considerations.

Upon some natures oratory, the successful swaying of the crowd, has the same effect, irrespective of the tone and content of the speech, that is produced by the harmony of a great orchestra, an effect of exaltation and lawlessness. In the young mathematician this responsiveness was a marked trait, at variance with another more coldly intellectual quality. He began to feel that he ranged at will, freed from artificial and unreal restraints. He, too, would do some great thing. On that full wave of excitement he was carried beyond the dikes which in cooler moments he had erected against himself.

When the audience arose to depart, he looked longingly in the direction of the box in which Felicity sat. He would fain have leaped upon the stage and have gone to her before she could escape him; he was burning to speak to her, to hear her voice and touch her hand. But her departure with her friends was little less than precipitate. It did not now occur to her lover that she might wish to avoid her husband; as far as he was concerned, she had no husband. He only appreciated his own disappointment, and stood chafing before the stupid herd that blocked his way to the street.

In this mood he cared not at all to discuss the events of the evening with his companion; but Cardington was full of caustic comment.

"It was a great occasion," he mused. "We have seen what we came out to see, and what more have we a right to demand? The dear people rampant, the respected mayor quiescent, but biding his time, Cobbens couchant but fanged, the President raised to a sublime apotheosis. It is always a pleasure—is it not?—to witness transcendent ability, even if it be in the line of practical politics. The perfection of each thing is worth observing. These local politicians are fools compared with the President, mere blundering tyros in the hands of a master of the craft." His eyes began to gleam with merriment. "And, by the way, that was a noble effort of Mr. Cobbens, 'apples of gold in pitchers of silver.'"

His soliloquy lasted unbroken until they reached the street. To his companion there was now no inspiration in the moonlight, no sweetness in the unusual mildness of the air. His restless eyes searched in vain the long line of carriages, but Felicity was nowhere to be seen. He caught sight of the bishop driving off alone, and Cardington noticed the direction of his glance.

"Ah," he said, "the bishop is doubtless about to betake himself to the final reception to the President at the Warwick Club. Which reminds me that the Bradford House is only a short walk from here."

CHAPTER XV

"I PLUCKED THE ROSE, IMPATIENT OF DELAY"

THE Bradford House was a famous hostelry, and had long been deservedly popular for its cuisine. It was a pleasure to sit in the long, low café, to observe the rafters of natural wood, the antique fireplace, and the mural paintings illustrating scenes from Colonial history: the landing at Plymouth Rock, the death of Miantonomoh, the Boston Tea Party. Still more pleasant it was, while the colonists attacked the Pequods on the wall, to attack a lobster salad or a welsh rabbit on the table, and to reflect that the main business of men *fruges consumere nati* was no longer to fight Indians.

Some such comforting reflection seemed to be mirrored in the genial countenance of Professor Littleford, as he sat with Miss Wycliffe and the Parrs in a corner, listening to the music that floated in from the room beyond, and viewing the scene through the smoke of his cigarette.

He and Miss Wycliffe had a full view of the room, to which the Parrs had shown their indifference by turning their backs, Mrs. Parr being absorbed in her own excited comments upon the scene in the opera house, while her husband was earnestly employed in the business which had brought him to that place. In fact, he had pleasantly occupied the major time of the President's speech in gustatory anticipations that were now being realised to his perfect satisfaction; and if he thought of the mayor at all, it was to reflect that Emmets could come and go without changing the flavour of his favourite viands.

"It was fortunate," Littleford remarked, "that I telephoned over and reserved this table, but I'm afraid our friends have disappointed us."

He glanced uneasily at the chairs leaning one against each end of the table, and then over the room. In all that crowd of eager talkers there was practically but one theme of conversation, the recent scene in the opera house, and but one verdict, praise of the committee. In obscure saloons the same topic was bandied back and forth over bars dripping with beer, but there the verdict went the other way. Could all the excited comment on this subject, all the oaths and laughter, have been collected into one volume of sound, what a mighty roar would have ascended, shattering the far quiet of the moonlit night!

As Littleford looked across the room, three men entered the door and began to make their way between the tables in his direction. The first was Cobbens, his hat in the bend of his arm, as if it had rested there continuously since his performance on the platform. He was acutely conscious of the interest his appearance aroused, and bowed from left to right with his nervous, expansive smile, a Gallic personality in manner and dress. It was evident that he felt himself among friends, and regarded his entrance as something of a triumphal progress. To him social Warwick was the world, and its approval was commendation enough, in spite of the President's rebuke. He by no means estimated at its full value the hatred he had won from the masses, and to see him now, a pleased and genial person, the fact was hard to realise. His companions, or rather, the men who followed in his wake, were Cardington and Leigh. They had left their hats and coats in the check-room, and were following the lawyer's lead instinctively, as men will in the mazes of a crowded place. At the same moment Littleford held up his hand and the bishop's daughter indicated her presence and her welcome by a beckoning motion of her napkin. All three men saw the signal and accepted it.

Littleford's brow clouded slightly at sight of Leigh, and his greeting of the young man was a shade less cordial than his greeting of the other two. There were three men and two chairs, which was awkward, and he was expecting only Swigart and Cobbens. Cardington was always welcome, but the astronomer was still an outsider, and the present excitement was one of peculiarly local interest. Had Leigh been a man of means, Littleford would have commanded the waiter to find another chair somewhere, even at the risk of being obliged to compress his ample form against the wall; but now he retained his seat in deliberate helplessness, hoping that the situation would presently be adjusted by the tactful withdrawal of the only supernumerary of the party. Unhappily for this hope, the supernumerary was not disposed to regard himself as such. He may have known that Cobbens would have left his hat outside had he intended to remain, but at all events, it needed only Miss Wycliffe's smile of welcome to justify him in taking the chair beside her.

Her acknowledgement of the lawyer's greeting was brief and perfunctory, as if she forgot to masque her indifference; and just as unconsciously she betrayed her partiality for the young astronomer by those minute signals which a woman displays when off her guard. She swayed toward him almost imperceptibly, and looked at him with content, as a woman looks at the man she loves before she realises more than her desire to have him near.

Cobbens began to apologise for himself and the judge. "I forgot that of course we were expected at the club, when I promised to meet you here; but it seems we are still on dress parade."

"Let me congratulate you," Mrs. Parr interposed, "for putting that creature in his place."

"It was neat," Littleford commented, with appreciation.

Felicity glanced up from her conversation with

Leigh to meet an unmistakable desire for her judgment in the lawyer's eyes. The winning prettiness of her manner, the transient glow, were gone in an instant, to be replaced by an expression almost stony in its unhappiness.

"Something had to be done," Cobbens observed modestly, "to maintain the dignity of the city."

The moment was epic in its possibilities, to two of the men present. Cobbens might interpret an expression of approval on her part as a sign that she forgave him for humiliating her *protégé* and had outgrown her fancy, but to Leigh such an expression would mean infinitely more. Thus they waited, each hoping for the significant and illuminating word. But none was given. At the lawyer's mention of dignity in connection with himself, a slight smile hovered about the corners of her lips, but it found no reflection in the cold brightness of her eyes. She made as if she failed to realise that a comment was expected, or as if the subject were not of sufficient interest to move her to speak. The hiatus was closed before its existence could be felt, except by the three so vitally concerned.

"I did think," Littleford explained, "that it would be pleasanter here because of the jam at the club. That 's why I proposed that you and Swigart slip away."

The lawyer, perhaps not yet convinced that he had played and lost, now addressed Felicity directly.

"Won't you come to the reception with Mr. Littleford and me, Miss Wycliffe? I brought my machine around for the express purpose of carrying you off."

"I'm too comfortable to move now," she answered coolly, "and I don't propose to make the President shake hands with me twice in one day. Besides, I want to have a little chat with Mr. Leigh. We haven't met for ages. Mr. Littleford, I know you want to go,"—

"I deny it," he interposed gallantly.

—"and as I refuse to move, I don't see why my stubbornness should keep you away from something more interesting."

"In other words," Cobbens said, with as good a grace as his disappointment would allow, "we have received our *congé*, and had better not stand upon the order of our going."

She greeted this declaration with laughing protest, but the two went off together, Littleford being eager to get from one of the participants the inside history of the scene he had witnessed, and Cobbens well aware that to remain would be to subject himself gratuitously to the humiliation of taking a second place in her attention.

Leigh, exhilarated by his good fortune, was impervious to the keen, malicious glance the lawyer had bestowed upon him, while Cardington, who had stood by during the whole colloquy in perfect silence, did not even now venture to seat himself, but looked down upon Felicity with the mute reproach of one neglected.

"Mr. Cardington," she said gaily, "don't stand there like a clock-tower, without striking a note, but take Mr. Littleford's place here by me."

He did as she commanded, and having given his order, he took out a cigarette and puffed meditatively.

"Now please don't fall into the doleful doldrums," she protested, "when we 've had such an enlivening evening."

"A most effective alliteration," he murmured, but without spontaneity. It was evident that the doldrums were very real with him, for he made no effort to take part in the ensuing conversation, in spite of the fact that the subject was one which might have aroused him to his best endeavours.

Felicity's mood was a revelation to Leigh, though he could not fail to divine its cause, and to guess the emotions she had undergone. Had her pride led her to defend her husband, or had she been reserved and sad, he would not have been surprised, but her sparkle and gaiety were like the glancing of light on the surface of a rock. She even shared in Mrs. Parr's ecstatic triumph over Emmet and echoed her praise of Cobbens, but with a subtle effect of mockery, so that her friend was presently reduced to a hurt and bewildered silence. In all this Leigh saw the effect of her husband's humiliation upon her, that it had torn from the mayor the last shred of the glamour with which her foolish fancy had once surrounded him. He was moved to speculate upon her probable attitude, had Emmet seized his opportunity and risen adequately to the occasion, but the speculation was fruitless, and the present topic of conversation full of hazard to himself. He was guiltless of the vulgarity of showing an animus against Emmet, guiltless also of the hypocrisy of defending him against his wife; and he embraced the opportunity Mrs. Parr's discomfiture offered of turning the talk to Bermuda.

How much of this psychological drama was visible to Cardington it would be impossible to say, but apparently he was lost to his surroundings, for he allowed the others to thresh out the Emmet incident without the assistance of his own able flail. Not until the conversation turned to Bermuda did he arouse himself from his reverie and take the lead. The topic suggested to his mind the influence of climate upon architecture and the arts, and presently he was exploring distant ramifications of the theme.

"I feel it incumbent upon myself," Cardington said, "to confess that I gave Mr. Emmet my careful consideration this evening, during the moments I could spare from a contemplation of our Chief Executive, and I must say that I found him the more interesting study of the two. I began to demolish my earlier views, or prejudices, and to build up a new opinion of the man. Fairness compels me to admit that I got a different conception of his possibilities. As I sat looking at him, expecting to see every sign of demoralisation in his aspect, I began to perceive that he by no means regarded himself down and out for good, if you will allow the sporting phrase. Mr. Emmet was fooled this time, but he will not be fooled again. I thought I could see that he had learned his lesson well, and if I were Mr. Anthony Cobbens, I should feel the stirring of a very considerable doubt as to the ultimate outcome of the struggle to which he has now committed himself. Perhaps he has provoked a jinnee in that young man which will one day rise up and envelop him in a cloud of political suffocation. Don't you think so, Miss Felicity?"

He looked at her inquiringly, anticipating her acquiescence. In his expression the ideal and impersonal quality that constituted his peculiar charm was now apparent, and suggested an inward exaltation, as if he had gained a victory over himself and had made an honourable amend. Leigh, watching her with tense emotion, saw that she was deeply impressed, and he seemed to read the record of her thoughts in the shadows that came and went within her eyes. She was weighing her husband's qualities and possibilities in the scales of this unexpected opinion, and the decision hung suspended in the balance. As he divined her secret struggle and realised that she might go back to the man who did not love her, who wished to use her for his own advancement, he suffered an agony of jealousy that was well-nigh insupportable.

For a few moments she delayed to answer, toying with her fork in thoughtful abstraction. In fact, her love for the young astronomer beside her was contending with the old desire to control her husband and to make him a figure in the world. In the inmost recesses of her heart she knew that she no longer loved Emmet, and that they could never wholly meet. What she did not, perhaps, so frankly own was the fact that she had found too late the man she could have loved and for whom she should have waited. With him she had common social experiences and religious traditions, and time had taught her the value of these things she had once imagined she despised. But, after all, it was the right man against the wrong man, irrespective of such considerations. Now that Emmet was mayor, she found she did not care; the prize was an apple of Sodom in her hand. He had even lost the picturesqueness which appeared to be his in another sphere, without gaining in compensation the things that were Leigh's by inheritance. The argument went against him now, if that could be called an argument which was only a question of love. She looked up finally with a smile that seemed to indicate indifference, or the weary shelving of a long vexed question.

"Perhaps you are right," she answered. "I'm sure I don't presume to say."

Cardington rose to his feet abruptly, and his glance seemed one of judgment upon her.

"A scandalous proceeding!" he broke out. "This night's work was a scandalous proceeding." Her startled flush arrested him, and his tone attained a sudden jocularity. "Well, I must leave you here to fight it out among yourselves. I have a piece of work that is calling loudly to me from the hill. Good-night!" He paid his bill, and strode away without another word.

"I never knew a man with such a range of learning," Leigh said; "he makes the rest of us seem like ignoramuses."

"We are all his students," Mrs. Parr put in, "whether we wish to be or not." She spoke with such feeling that the others were moved to laughter. For some time she had been looking from Leigh to Felicity with that birdlike movement of the head, until she had made a woman's great discovery, that her friend was not indifferent to his admiration. Without going so far as to wish Felicity to marry him, she was deeply pleased that he seemed to have driven away the more unworthy fancy. This was enough for the present, and her content shone in her glances toward the young man like an unspoken message of good-will.

As they stood on the curb outside while Mr. Parr went to find his carriage, the scene before them presented such a contrast with the experiences of the evening that instinctively they were hushed in contemplation. The bare branches of the trees in the park across the way were silvered by the rays of the full moon, which wrought a motionless tracery on the thin remnant of snow beneath. Through a gap could be seen the white shaft of the soldiers' monument, lifting high above the trees a splendid figure of Victory, with wings outspread against the pale sky. Modelled after the Pillar of Trajan, only more lovely in the purity of its white marble, it was one of the rare objects of art that gave Warwick a claim to distinction and justified the pride of its citizens. Around it were carved innumerable figures of soldiers, climbing a spiral pathway. Indistinguishable now in the moonlight, they still remained in the memory, like the echo of a martial song.

This was the first appeal of the night, made to the eye alone; but presently, despite the random noises of the street, they became aware of a dull, continuous sound, and knew that the stream which intersected the park on its way to the river had been freed from ice by the January thaw, and was pouring its swollen waters over the dam. The note was deep and full, like a solemn recitative, as if Nature's diurnal harmonies had sunk to this one transitional key. Above all, the mildness of the air, full of the alluring witchery of a false spring, affected the imagination like a delicate, ethereal wine.

Leigh lifted his head and swept the sky with the keenness of the scientist to whom its vast spaces are a familiar book; yet when he suddenly desisted and looked down at Felicity, she saw in his eyes the rare expression of the poet.

"It would almost seem," he said, "that Nature has gradually been taking on a more serene and mysterious beauty every moment, to rebuke the feverish struggles of men."

Their glances lingered, and he read in her a wild unhappiness and a suggestion of reckless daring that stirred his heart to he knew not what tempestuous emotions. He found in that look a license for his dreams, and made her the guardian of his conscience. He had no wish to be more honourable than she, and this surrender was attended by an ecstasy that derived its final sweetness from a sense of transgression. When the carriage came round, he handed Mrs. Parr in, and then hesitated.

"We ought to walk home such a night as this, Miss Wycliffe," he suggested.

Mrs. Parr leaned forward and laughed lightly with appreciation. "Felicity, dear," she said, "if you 're going to walk, do draw up your hood, or you 'll catch cold."

Leigh's heart grew warm with gratitude at this friendly interposition, and to his surprise even Parr himself seemed not indifferent to his cause. "Yes," he added, pulling at his cigar till it glowed redly, "this is the kind of weather when one catches cold easily. The worst cold I ever caught was during one of these January thaws." With this advice they drove away, pleased with their innocent coöperation.

Felicity, laughing at their warning, nevertheless accepted the suggestion. The long Shaker cloak gave a demure and Puritanical effect to her figure as her head disappeared beneath the hood, an effect of outline merely, for the richness of its crimson hue suggested other associations. For some time they walked in comparative silence through the park, pausing for a moment on the stone arch that spanned the stream to note the glint of the moon on the swirling water, and even when they found themselves at last in Birdseye Avenue, their talk was all of the night and the sorcery of its effects, veiling and again unconsciously betraying the nature of their inward thoughts.

A realisation of the fact that his opportunity was slipping by moved Leigh to desperation. Yet an opportunity for what? Try as he might, he could never understand how she had come to marry Emmet; her practical repudiation of the act could not undo it. What was he to hope for from this cruel and beautiful woman? He was indifferent to the fact that for some time he had not spoken.

"What are you thinking of?" she asked, turning upon him with a hint of challenge. "Has the moonlight bewitched you, Mr. Leigh?"

"Not the moonlight," he answered shortly, "though I am bewitched."

She regarded him with an air of inquiry, even of invitation. Was it possible that she failed to know what might result? Did she hunger for further evidences of her power?

"Don't look at me like that," he went on, "if you wish me to remember that you once forbade me to love you. Don't I know how hopeless my love is? Your eyes have come between me and my work day and night to invite me to take what you can never give, and what I believe you would not give if you could. Is n't it enough that you have been cruel to one man?"

They were passing her house, but neither paused. His passion had led him to disclose his knowledge of her secret, and her heart was gripped in a sudden fear. For the moment, it seemed to her that all Warwick must know, that the fact she now desired to conceal was common property, to be to-morrow the wonder of the town.

"See how deserted the street is," he said. "It is as if you and I were walking alone in the world, and who can tell when we shall be alone again?"

Presently he paused and faced her. She stood looking up at him, her face, framed by the gathered edge of her crimson hood, ethereally beautiful in the full moonlight.

"Do you know how a man feels when he loves you, Felicity?" he demanded. It was the first time he had ever addressed her by that name, but she accepted it without protest, waiting with parted lips for his next words. "How can you be so quiet?" he went on passionately. "It is n't possible that you can be as cruel as you seem! Why did n't you treat me brutally at the very first, and give me my answer before I was such a fool as to ask the question? That would have been kindness. But you let me hope, I don't know why, perhaps because you wanted to use me, perhaps to feed your vanity. Just now I hardly know what I am saying to you; but don't think that I shall be one of your victims. You owe me something, Felicity, some memory to carry with me the rest of my life. That at least I will have, even if I must pay for it by never seeing you again."

Before she could forestall his intention, he had drawn her into his arms. Her hand faltered in a vain effort against his breast, and she was lost. She leaned against him helplessly. "There," he said, kissing her once and again, "now you know how I love you."

They stood apart, trembling. In his eyes shone a mournful triumph, while her indignation was rendered speechless by a full knowledge of her responsibility for the act. She could have averted it, had she wished.

"I did not dream," he said at last, as if speaking to himself alone, "that a woman could be so sweet."

"Have you forgotten that I am"— She could not frame the word that hovered on her lips, nor maintain the dignity for which she strove against the suffocating tumult of joy that rioted in her heart.

"Your husband gave me his confidence," he answered bitterly. "You see how well I deserved it."

"Then you realise what you have done." There was a note of finality in her voice, and, turning slowly, she began to retrace her steps. She was unconscious of the fact that they were walking close together until the sound of a carriage overtaking them caused her to draw away instinctively and to glance with apprehension at the roadway. The vehicle passed within a few feet of the curb, and the bishop leaned forward with a look of recognition.

"Father has been to the reception," she said. "I must go in now."

"There is so much I want to say," he protested.

She smiled drearily. "You must spare me further humiliation," she answered. He knew her meaning without more words. He must not speak to her of her mistake, nor hint of the possibility of her freedom. Yet it was this possibility that struggled dumbly within them for recognition, so that now their mood was one of storm, all the more intense from its repression. They were conscious each moment of the man who stood between them, no longer the familiar figure, but one evoked by their mutual guilt and sublimated by Cardington's prophetic words, strong to avenge himself upon his enemies and betrayers. Leigh, convinced that Emmet would claim his own, suffered already the anguish of renunciation, more poignant that the pressure of her unresisting lips was still felt warmly on his own. Before her house he stooped and kissed her again without fear of repulse, chastened and subdued.

"Since it is to be good-bye," she said quietly.

He stood where she left him, watching her figure lessening between the trees until it was swallowed up in the shadow of the house. The door opened, he saw the crimson flash of her cloak for a moment in the light from within, and then she was gone.

The bishop, sitting beside the lamp with a book in his hand, glanced up as his daughter entered, with a keen inquiry in his deepset eyes.

"I thought I just passed you with Mr. Leigh," he remarked, watching the effect of his words. Her unusual colour and the brilliancy of her eyes served to confirm his suspicions, though her manner was as studiedly indifferent as his own. It was with difficulty that she restrained the trembling of her fingers fumbling with the fastening of her cloak.

"Yes," she answered. "Mr. Leigh met us at the Bradford after the President's speech, and the night was so beautiful that we walked home together."

Looking at her attentively, he was struck by a new softness and radiance in her beauty, and by the fact that the Shaker cloak was singularly becoming. He thought of his sermon on personal adornment, and in spite of his anxiety, a deep amusement dawned in his eyes. "And went around Robin Hood's barn, by the way," he supplemented.

"Is n't the longest way round the shortest way home?" she asked coolly. His smile had reassured her. Whatever he suspected, it was much less than the truth.

It was not in the bishop's nature to come out with a direct question that might precipitate a scene, except as a last resort, and he presently bade her good-night, after commenting upon the events of the evening with the casual interest of one accustomed to public spectacles. In reality, his interest had been deep, but now another matter demanded his thought, and he was willing to be alone. He was reminded by the encounter in the street that it was high time to put the machinery in operation by which the young professor was to be quietly dismissed from St. George's Hall. Satisfied with his analysis of his daughter's state of mind, he perfected his plan, and went to bed in comparative content.

Leigh sat for a long time staring at the flame of his lamp and striving to take reckoning with himself. He could no more have told how he found his way to his room than if he had been carried thither in a state of insensibility, but there he was, trying to think, while mere .emotion still held a riotous sway. He had kissed her, and the touch of her lips, the fragrance of her skin, were even now present in his senses. The experience caused him to readjust his impression of her. She had lost something in his eyes. What was it? Not height; though she seemed less tall. The change was not in stature. Like Pygmalion, he had found the marble grow warm and human beneath his caress; he was still bewildered by the wonder of it, and mad with a sense of triumph. She had lost her inaccessibility, her inviolable distance, but she had gained in womanly quality, gained infinitely upon his heart, so that now he longed for only one thing — to take her in his arms once more. At the thought he flushed warmly; but suddenly his heart grew cold, as her words came back so vividly to his mind that they seemed spoken audibly in the room: "Since it is to be good-bye."

He arose from his chair and walked rapidly up and down the room, as if to escape from his own condemnation. Had he, then, no honour at all? The question brought him face to face with his naked soul, and he was afraid. What sophistry was that by which he had justified his act? He had argued that it was to be a kiss of farewell, and no sooner had he attained his wish than all thought of the stipulation vanished utterly from his mind, leaving only a more insatiable longing. The last vestige of his morality seemed to be swept away, and memory made the taste of stolen waters still sweet to his lips. When he judged Emmet so severely, he was proudly sure of his own standards, but now he felt he had none. Her husband's scornful and warning look, the day they encountered each other in the street, was then prophetic. The man estimated him unerringly, and knew what he had to fear.

Reflection had come at last, and would not down. Surely, Emmet was the more honourable of the two, and had been more sinned against than sinning. He had slipped, had recovered himself, and was honestly striving to make amends. How shamefully cruel his treatment had been from every hand, from his wife's, his friend's, his political opponents'! Where was now his own guilty triumph of a few moments since? He sank into his chair once more, and faced the fact that Emmet had given him an example to follow, that he must keep his promise not to see Felicity again.

His eye fell upon his pipe and he seized it avidly. At the table, he had not smoked with Cardington and Parr; he had scarcely eaten. Now, the tobacco brought peculiar relief to his over-wrought mind, and dulled for a few moments the edge of his remorse. In the wavering clouds of smoke he saw her eyes once more. And the crimson cloak! Was ever a wrap worn by mortal woman so bewitching, so deliciously contradictory in its suggestions? The Shaker women never married, and this was their peculiar garment, though they always wore one of sad, monotonous gray. Every winter they came to Warwick and sold cloaks of worldly colours to the rich young women of the town, seeking money for their dwindling settlement. In the contradiction between the demureness of outline and the warmth of colour the wearer found a weapon of coquetry.

Presently the pipe was smoked out, and then the second and the third, with gradual lessening of narcotic power. The vision of the senses was gone, and the relentless reality of duty returned. Once more he left his chair and began his restless pacing to and fro. Thus the miserable night wore on, until he threw himself upon his bed to win the oblivion of sleep.

But now another memory assailed him: the night following his meeting with Felicity in the woods, when, during fitful dreams, a vision of that strange figure rising up in the shadows beyond the fire returned to haunt him. Suddenly he was sitting up in bed, staring into the darkness. In despair he went to his windows and raised the curtains to see if it were near the dawn. It was four o'clock, but night still covered the wintry landscape. The full moon was setting in the west. Transformed from a natural object by the medium of his over-strained and weary mind, it now presented a sinister and mocking face, as it peered through the diamonded panes and poured a flood of yellow light upon the floor.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLINDNESS OF THE BISHOP

THE following morning, Felicity did not appear at the breakfast-table, a circumstance sufficiently unusual to cause the bishop some uneasiness, for she rarely failed to rise at a reasonable hour.

"Lena," he said, "go upstairs and see whether Miss Wycliffe is ill, but don't wake her if she is still asleep."

Left alone, he glanced over the morning paper, too much absorbed in the hypothesis that would explain his daughter's non-appearance to find much amusement in the editor's bland and innocuous comments upon the sensational episode of the preceding night. He recalled her evident excitement and preoccupation when she came in from her walk with Leigh. If her interview with the young man had been what he feared, it was natural she should have lain awake long into the night, and his heart misgave him at this additional confirmation of his insight.

When Lena Harpster received no response to her gentle tap, she ventured to open the door softly and to step within her mistress's room. The lightest sleeper could scarcely have been awakened by her entrance, as noiseless as a shadow or the slow swaying of a curtain. She stood near the foot of the bed, in the dim and fragrant room, looking at the beautiful head upon the pillow, the dark, abundant hair, the half-open lips relaxed from the control of the mind, revealing now more clearly all the promises and passions which when awake they might deny.

Some sense of the awe and mystery of sleep caused Lena to stand thus motionless at gaze, herself a pale, ethereal figure, scarcely less beautiful than her mistress. There was a guilty consciousness also of deliberate intrusion. Familiar as she was with the room, it now took on a different aspect to her eyes. All the objects of art, the tapestries and pictures and statuettes, which she had admired for themselves, seemed in a peculiar way the property of their happy owner, an overflowing expression of her abundant loveliness. What a contrast that lace-covered bed, that nest of luxury, presented to her own simple couch beneath the roof, which served merely as a place where she could lie down and rest! And there was another contrast of which she was unaware. The sleeping face was more instinct with life, though Sleep is said to be the brother of Death, than the shadowed eyes that watched.

Miss Wycliffe, she reflected, had only to wish for a thing, and possession was assured. Above all, it was the thought that she might also have taken her lover from her which kept the girl's eyes fixed in wistful speculation. She had ventured to write again to Emmet, but without result; he had even passed her blindly on the street, leaving her faint, with a whispered greeting dying pathetically on her lips. How could she contend with her mistress, if what she feared were true? Yet how slender her cause of suspicion! Only the incident of the ring, which Miss Wycliffe had explained most naturally; but the final warning against Emmet remained in her mind as a declaration of possession.

It was characteristic of Lena's nature that she yielded to no one in appreciation of Felicity's beauty. Chastened rather than embittered by a conviction of her own loss, she was not without a consciousness of the appealing change which sleep now made in the woman she had such cause to dread. No hint remained of that imperious quality which moulded others to her will. She seemed to have grown softer, and there was something childlike in the position of her arm on the counterpane, in her hand turned palm upward, in her half-curled fingers. A lover, were he a poet, might have likened them to the petals of a flower that had begun to open with returning day. Presently the sleeper stirred and opened her eyes, dimly aware of a retreating presence and a closing door, but when, an hour later, she awoke fully, the impression was like that of a dream.

It was ten o'clock when she rang her bell and ordered breakfast in her room. This order was as unusual as her late sleep, but she seemed to herself to have awakened a different person, one in whom such small changes of action were merely an index of greater possibilities. She received her father's inquiries through Lena with indifference, and sent back word that she had been only over-tired. Knowing that he lingered below to see her, she delayed deliberately until he should grow impatient and leave the house, for she wished to take up again the train of thought that had kept her so long awake the previous night. At present, her sole concern was of herself and of her lover.

Having placed the steaming cup of coffee beside her on the dressing-table, she sipped it from time to time while she fastened up her hair. Like Leigh, she too had come to a new realisation of self, but the revelation was attended with far less of spiritual turmoil. It was as if she were making her own acquaintance over again, and the process was not without fascination. He had called her cruel. Was there truth in the charge? She had never been conscious of intentional cruelty, and yet she was intellectual enough to see that her husband might have good reason to accuse her of it in her treatment of him. But Leigh had no such cause of complaint, unless he would hold her responsible for her beauty. There must be some expression in her face which she herself had never seen, which she could never summon from its reflection in the mirror, an expression of desire, impersonal it might be, but moving the beholder to a personal response.

She was pleased, rather than distressed, by Leigh's condemnation. In spite of his talk of cruelty and vanity, he had said he did not know a woman could be so sweet. She knew she could be sweet to the man she loved, and that no one had ever yet divined how much she had to give. She placed the back of her hand against her lips and tried to imagine how they had felt to him when he kissed them. The youthfulness of the action and the fancy made her smile, and showed her how far she had gone in thinking of him as a lover.

Her sense of guilt was less acute than her realisation of the difficulty of her position. It came upon her that she was one day nearer discovery and condemnation. As yet no plan of action had taken final shape in her mind. She did not know whether she would wait for discovery to come and find her, or take the initiative. Leigh's declaration had acted as a sedative on her unhappiness, and had banished the desire of an explanation with her husband. She would fain arrest time while the situation remained as it was, while Leigh was not yet lost to her for good. What did she mean by allowing him to kiss her a second time? Did she wish to make amends for the suffering she had caused, or was her acquiescence a fatal admission? In the latter case, what hope or consolation could she find in this new discovery?

Cardington too came in for a share of her thought, but scarcely for a share of her concern. Whatever his suspicions or knowledge, she was sure that his affection and loyalty would keep him silent. If his final outbreak at the table the previous evening expressed his indignation at Emmet's treatment, it seemed to tell also his acceptance of the inevitable, and to convey to her in her doubt his advice, almost his entreaty. It was as if he had pointed out to her the path of duty, and warned her against his colleague, not in a spirit of jealousy, but in the spirit of a friend who had reached an absolute renunciation of whatever hopes he might once have cherished, and now thought only of her. For a moment she softened almost to the point of tears, but this indulgence was brief. A vision of her husband's bulldog air, as he sat there baffled and at bay, returned to menace her. She realised that he would not leave matters longer as they were, that he might force the crisis that very day. The mettle of the bishop's daughter was never more apparent than now, as she faced the probable results of her own actions. She was by no means inclined to take her punishment quietly, or to admit that she was in the wrong. Having ruled her husband so long, she would not now allow him to dictate to her, but would fight for her own happiness. Her hands clenched involuntarily, and her breath came quick with militant excitement. Had she been a man, her career, in whatever line she might have chosen, could scarcely have been less than remarkable.

Meanwhile the bishop was frittering the morning away by a desultory attention to his correspondence, hoping each moment that Felicity would pass the open door of his study. He was no longer a busy man, for the onerous duties of his office were now taken by his coadjutor, and he could well afford to wait. He did not know what he wished to say to her, but he would see her face again and observe her manner, that he might examine anew his grounds of suspicion. For him there were no longer golden hours which it were a sin for others to filch from him. In the sunset of his life he dreamed of the active labours of his successors, of the institution which he would leave in a position to feed more generously the ministry of the Church. Should he allow her foolish fancy for a fortune hunter to divert her from the purpose he hoped she would one day cherish? Even if a husband made no attempt to dissuade her, a child would inevitably become an heir, and her plans would be solely for him. Cold and austere by nature, he had married his own position to wealth, and he felt no desire to perpetuate his line under the name of another man. Above all, he shrunk from the thought of his daughter's marriage as from a profanation. She was so like him in certain mental traits and interests that he could not appreciate the temperamental difference that kept them far apart.

As the hands of the clock crept toward eleven, he realised that the morning was slipping away, and that he could wait no longer if he was to see President Renshaw before he went to lunch. A few minutes later, he stood in the hall, a distinguished and old-fashioned figure, with his silk hat, his long cape, and his gold-headed ebony cane. Lena Harpster was there, dusting an antique chair of ecclesiastical design that looked as if it had been imported from the chancel of some English cathedral.

"Lena," he said, laying his letters on the table and beginning to draw on his gloves, "don't forget to give these to the postman when he comes; and tell Miss Wycliffe I shall be home to lunch."

She opened the door for his exit and started back against the wall with a little cry, as if she had seen a ghost, for there, blocking the bishop's way, his hand extended to touch the bell, stood Mayor Emmet. The bishop, too much surprised to note the panic of his servant, was silent for a moment. It did not occur to him that the call could be on any one but himself. How great would his astonishment have been, had he known that poor Lena was almost fainting beside him with the wild hope that her lover had come to claim her at last! How great his stupefaction, could he have seen his daughter standing midway on the stairs, one hand on the baluster, the other raised to her heart in petrifying fear! It was fortunate indeed for Felicity that she had time, unobserved in the shadow of the stairway, to regain her self-control. Had she descended a moment earlier, had she been at the door when Lena threw it open, she could hardly have answered for herself.

The bishop retreated a step, as if he would thereby invite his visitor's entrance, but, busy with his gloves, his cane hugged under one arm, he failed, without the effect of discourtesy, to extend his hand.

"Ah, good-morning, Mr. Emmet," he said in his courtly and deliberate manner, and with that suggestion of a purr in his voice which always betokened concealment and a latent ability to spring. "You find me just about to go out, but I still have a little leeway. Won't you step in?"

He was not without curiosity in regard to the object of the mayor's visit. Speculation glimmered in his eyes, and his wide, affable smile was subtle with anticipation of a diplomatic test. He was secretly amused that Emmet should presume upon his blushing honours in this fashion, but doubtless the man had a plausible excuse for his intrusion, some civic scheme for which he wished to bespeak coöperation. After his humiliation the previous night, he had conceived a plan for drawing some of his opponents into his own camp, and this was perhaps the first movement of the new campaign. So ran the bishop's conjecture, and he was not surprised at his visitor's unmistakable air of excitement, at the pallor of his face. Perhaps his drubbing at the hands of Cobbens had taught him more respect for the class he had been wont to denounce to his followers, and had deprived him of a moiety of his self-assurance.

"Bishop Wycliffe," Emmet returned, coming into the hall and taking off his hat, "I had n't decided to call upon you — yet. It is your daughter whom I wish to see."

It was months since the bishop had given Felicity's advocacy of this man a thought. The election seemed to have killed her interest, for she had not spoken of him since, and besides, his suspicions were centred solely on Leigh. Perhaps, then, the scheme was one of charity, and the mayor had planned to begin with Felicity, remembering her former kindness.

The bishop hesitated, when the rustle of silken skirts caused him to turn his head, but he greeted Felicity's appearance unperturbed.

"Oh, here you are, my dear. I thought you had gone out."

"I overheard I had a caller," she returned, taking her husband's hand and meeting his eyes unflinchingly. "I have n't had a chance to congratulate you, Mr. Emmet, upon your election, for we had to go South the next day on account of father's health. You caught me at the feminine trick of listening over the banisters."

The bishop was secretly annoyed at her cordiality, but still confident that he could trust his daughter to remember the difference between a common interest in charitable work and social equality.

"I leave Mr. Emmet in your hands," he said to her. "I have a little business at the Hall, and shall return for lunch."

And he went out, thinking how like a bewildered yokel the mayor seemed in the face of his daughter's graceful greeting, and imagining with relish his further discomfiture.

The door had closed behind him, and as yet Emmet had not said a word to his wife. Even now it was she who took the initiative.

"Let us go into the drawing-room," she suggested, turning and leading the way. He followed at once, brushing past Lena with cruel emphasis of manner. There she stood, or rather leaned against the wall, like one stricken. The jar of his passing seemed to release the tension of her limbs, and she sank down slowly, noiselessly, in a dead faint. Emmet neither heeded her anguish nor heard her soft fall upon the heavy rug. He hurriedly closed the drawing-room door to prevent his sweetheart from overhearing his interview with his wife, and strode into the centre of the room, where Felicity had turned at bay.

"What have you come for?" she asked in a low voice. Her face was as white as his own, but her self-control was greater.

"For you, Felicity," he answered. "You are my wife, and I 've come for you."

"I did n't know," she returned relentlessly, "but you had come to see that poor girl in the hall to whom you gave my ring. Looking from the stairs, I saw by her manner that she thought so too."

"My God, Felicity!" he gasped, "I believe you 've kept her in this house like a bird in a cage, to torture her as you 've tortured me. Why did n't you send her away, when you discovered I'd been making love to her?"

"For your greater convenience?"

"Oh, as for that," he retorted, "when you left her here in Warwick and went away, you practically threw her into my arms. But I did n't take advantage of it, — only once, — and then I stopped short. That was what I came to explain. I want you to know how much less cause you have to throw me over in this way than you think. I want you to forgive me, and to keep your promise. She 's nothing to me — nothing. She 's no more to me than any one of the dozen men you 've been running around with are to you, — Cobbens, for example, or that young professor up at the Hall."

There was more than a suggestion of scorn in his refusal to mention his real rival by name, and in the belittling adjective. His assumption that she cared nothing for Leigh would perhaps have found acceptance in her mind only the day before, but now a memory of last night's scene made her as cruel to her husband as he had just been to Lena Harpster. She looked at him coolly, aware of her utter awakening from the adventurous and romantic mood she had mistaken for love, wondering also that she should ever have supposed this man capable of satisfying her ideal. The ideal itself had vanished in the personality of the man who had taken her in his arms the previous night and poured his passionate love into her ears.

"It is n't a question of forgiving, Tom," she said, after a pause; and her tone was conciliatory. "It 's a question of discovery. I was deceived in you. I did n't think you capable of such — such weakness and vulgarity. It was my fault of judgement, perhaps, but the awakening is fatal. Can't you see that?"

"What do you mean to do?" he demanded, glaring at her helplessly. Their points of view were so different, her expression so unrelenting, that the self-justification he had planned to speak was choked in his throat. "Do you mean to get a divorce? I tell you, Felicity, there 's no cause."

"I don't know yet what I mean to do," she said frankly.

"I 'll call upon your father, then," he declared grimly, "and see what he thinks of it." An ugly gleam shone in his eyes, as he uttered the threat. It was plain now that love for his wife was the least of his motives in demanding her; there was ambition, but, strongest of all, a desire for revenge on the bishop and his class. He would make them accept him at last. They should pay dearly for their scorn. "I 'll not be elbowed out of the way and kept in the closet like a family skeleton any longer," he went on. "The limit of my endurance has been reached."

Felicity now saw clearly what she had brought upon herself. She paled with fear, and flushed with anger, but neither emotion coloured her reply.

"You must give me a few days longer. I prefer to see my father first — alone. I will let you know — I 'll write."

So absorbed were they in their own tense feelings that they failed to hear the opening and shutting of the front door, which was left unlatched during the day for just such unconventional calls as the one Mrs. Parr now happened to make. The first intimation they had of interruption was her shrill and terror-stricken cry: "Felicity! Felicity! Your maid is here in the hall — dead!"

Emmet reached Lena's side first. He raised her in his arms and carried her into the room he had just left, where he laid her gently on a couch. Felicity had already run upstairs for brandy and smelling-salts. Emmet, standing over Lena in guilty solicitude, addressed Mrs. Parr.

"Open the window," he said brusquely, "and give her some air."

She obeyed without question, and Felicity, returning with restoratives, found her husband hovering over her maid with tell-tale anxiety written on every feature, while her friend stood at the window looking on in curious conjecture. Together they bent over the girl's white face and moistened her lips with brandy. Presently, Lena's eyelids fluttered and trembled open. The mayor lifted her once more, as if she were a child, and stood erect.

"I'll carry her to her room," he said to Felicity, "if you'll show me the way."

"It's two flights of stairs," she objected. "Perhaps she had better stay here for a while."

"She's as light as a feather, poor girl," he returned. "She's nothing for me to carry."

"You forget, Felicity," Mrs. Parr put in, with double meaning, "that Mr. Emmet is an athlete."

Without further protest, Felicity led the way upstairs, and Emmet followed with his burden. It was inevitable that the gentle clinging of those arms about his neck, the pressure of her golden head, should melt his heart like wax and make temporary havoc of his resolution. Impulsively he bent his face until it rested a moment in her hair. Circumstances had thrown them together once more in their natural relationship, both of them scorned, each needing and understanding the other in a peculiar way. No bold claims or passionate protests could have won the tender consideration her patient suffering drew from him.

Felicity opened the door, and stood aside to let him pass. He laid Lena carefully on her little bed and arranged her pillow, then turned toward the door. It was still open, though his wife no longer stood there, and he heard the diminishing rustle of her skirts. He stood looking first at the door and then back again at the bed, irresolutely. Lena opened her eyes and smiled at him with ineffable sweetness, and the temptation was overpowering. He took one noiseless step and sank upon his knees beside her.

"Good-bye, Lena," he murmured brokenly, the stinging and unaccustomed tears springing to his eyes; "good-bye, my poor little girl. If she were not my wife — my God, Lena, if she were only not my wife!"

The revelation could add nothing to the emotions she had already experienced. She was sure of his love; in her weakness and spiritual exaltation, that was enough. They were now bound together by a common tragedy, and she knew his gain was loss. If he had made her suffer, he had brought no less suffering upon himself, and her eyes shone with a pitiful triumph. His arms were about her, and his cheek was pressed to her own upon the pillow. Too weak herself to speak, or even to weep, her eyes told him all she wished to say.

"Forgive me, Lena," he entreated, "forgive me before I go."

"I do, Tom, dear," she whispered. "You know I do."

Her words fell upon his soul with infinite consolation. He felt that he had received the pardon of Heaven for his sins, and could now depart bravely to work out his penance. Softened and exalted, he little realised that the penance was unnecessary and self-imposed, that the mood which now took on the heroic tone of self-sacrifice was still a mood of self-seeking, that his love for Lena was selfish now as it had always been, and utterly unworthy of the devotion he received. It was true that he loved her, but he loved himself and his ambitions and revenges more. Her forgiveness was but permission to indulge them to the end. Nevertheless, when he found Felicity at the telephone in the hall below, his eyes were still bright with tears. She hung up the receiver and turned to him coldly. One glance at his face told her his state of mind and justified her own. She had never seen him at his worst before. Hypocritical with himself, filled with mawkish emotion that sublimated him in his own eyes, yet still grimly bent upon his original purpose, he had reached the very nadir of unattractiveness.

"I have sent for the doctor," she informed him, in the tone of one who has done her duty. "He will be here soon."

"Your answer," he said hoarsely. "I cannot leave without an answer."

"I will write — soon," she returned, "but leave me now."

Without further insistence he turned from her and ran downstairs. He was out on the sidewalk before he became aware that his head was uncovered. He returned to the drawing-room and found his hat on the floor, where it had fallen from his hand at Mrs. Parr's shrill alarm. She stood there still, waiting for Felicity's return, but neither looked at the other or spoke a word, frankly and mutually contemptuous. The door slammed behind him a second time, and almost immediately afterward Felicity entered.

"Well, Ella," she said, sinking into a chair, "did you ever see such an excitement? I never had a greater shock in my life than when you called out that she was dead. I 'm afraid she 's a very delicate girl, but she 's coming around all right, and I 've sent for the doctor." She showed unmistakably the strain she had endured.

"Felicity," her friend broke out excitedly, "there 's something here I don't understand. You don't mean to tell me you actually allow that man to call on you!"

Miss Wycliffe opened her eyes in astonishment. "What a goose you are, Ella! He came to see father. I had n't time to find out what he wanted when you nearly frightened me out of my wits."

Mrs. Parr, only partially convinced, was forced to accept the explanation; and though her eyes adumbrated reproach, she dared not say more. She remembered, however, the picture of Leigh and Felicity going off together in the moonlight the previous evening, and was reassured. In fact, she had run in to gossip about the young man, and to sound his praises with design, but the situation she encountered at her entering had revived her old suspicions concerning Emmet. Now she told herself that they were merely a habit of mind, without justification. She recalled the mayor's emotion as he bent over Lena, his averted face when he returned for his hat, and plunged at once into an account of the episode at the inn, which she had hitherto kept to herself. Before long they were discussing the probable nature of the tie between Emmet and Lena with apparently equal interest and conjecture.

About this time, the bishop, coming from Dr. Renshaw's office, met Leigh face to face on the walk as he was returning to his room from a recitation, and stopped to speak to him.

"Mr. Leigh," he remarked, with an observant twinkle in his eyes, "you look as if last night's experience had been too much for you."

"We had enough strenuous excitement to keep any one awake," was the reply. "It was too violent a break in my monastic life."

The bishop's smile widened; his innuendo had been skilfully parried. "When you get to be my age," he said, "you will doubtless take your politics more calmly. I never lose sleep now over the vicissitudes of those whom the fickle crowd has raised to honour. How does the line run? *Hunc, si mobilium turba Quiritium* — but you probably remember your Horace better than I do."

It was one of Bishop Wycliffe's little perversities to quote Latin at the devotees of science, and to maintain an ironical assumption of their appreciation.

"I don't remember a word of my Horace," Leigh declared. It was not the first time he had given the bishop the same information, and this fact lent emphasis to his tone.

"Too bad, too bad," the old man murmured. "I fear the rising generation has no atmosphere." And he went on his way, chuckling genially.

CHAPTER XVII

CONDITIONS

DR. LEIGH," said President Renshaw, in his gentle and measured utterance, "I sent for you on a little matter of business, for a few minutes of conversation, if you are at leisure."

The young astronomer signified that his time was the president's, and waited for his next words with an oppressive sense of vague foreboding. They were sitting in the room he had first entered, and Dr. Renshaw occupied the chair in which he then sat. As Leigh glanced about the room and back again at the old man's face, that first meeting seemed but yesterday, so unaltered was the scene. The tall clock, the old chair, the black cloth mitre with its tarnished gold insignia, the framed plans of St. George's Hall, were all in the same places. The president had not changed in the interim; it even seemed that he had not moved. But beyond the shapely oval of the old man's head a glimpse of wintry landscape was framed by the narrow window, instead of that earlier vision of the September morning.

In Leigh's alert and sensitive mood, these relics taunted him with their own permanence in the face of change. Those sticks of wood, those drawings, that piece of black cloth, were as ancient in a sense as the pyramids, and would retain their places while generations came before them, laboured their brief day, and then vanished as a puff of steam vanishes into blue sky. The clock had long since run down for good, and seemed by virtue of this very fact to have gained a victory over time.

"You remember, doubtless," the president resumed, "that your appointment was for this year only, and I asked you to come in to — in short, I should like to inquire whether you have made any plans for the future."

The form of the question was such that it might have been merely a preface to an offer of a permanent appointment, but Leigh divined too clearly the doctor's inward distress to give it such an interpretation. The dismissal of which he now felt assured was scarcely a surprise. It seemed but natural that the greater loss of Felicity should include the lesser loss of his position, and he smiled bitterly.

"You mean to suggest, sir, that some such plans on my part are advisable?"

"We might say it amounts to that," Dr. Renshaw returned reluctantly. His age, the kindness of his manner and tone, were disarming, and his listener entertained no more personal resentment toward him than if he were an ancient sibyl uttering of necessity the will of the Fates.

"I had not thought it necessary to make plans for next year," he said, "not being conscious of any shortcomings on my part sufficient to cause my dismissal. I am well aware that you are strictly within your rights, and that I have no legal redress, perhaps even no cause of complaint. I know how subordinates in business are turned away to suit the convenience, or at the whim, of their superiors; but in most colleges there is a sort of unwritten law that promotion shall follow efficient service. As a rule, the one year appointment is merely a safeguard to protect the institution from a man seriously incompetent or depraved."

"I know — I know," the president interposed, raising his hand as if to ward off more words. "And I would not have you think for a moment that we view you in any such light. On the contrary, I may say that personally I entertain for you the highest regard and consideration."

"What is the matter, then?" Leigh demanded. "It seems no more than fair that I should be told definitely where the trouble lies."

The other reflected awhile. "If I were to mention the one definite complaint, Mr. Leigh, it would not sum up the whole situation; it would be an explanation that only partially explained. However, the complaint has to do with your discipline in the class-room."

Leigh stared incredulously. "Discipline?" he echoed.

"Disorder in your class-room," Dr. Renshaw corroborated firmly. "Those passing by have heard laughter and unseemly shouts from within."

"Who could have made such a report?" Leigh wondered, still at a loss.

"The information came through a responsible channel, through one whose duty it is to take cognisance of such things and to report them to the proper authorities."

He was surprised to see that his listener was laughing, not without a suggestion of scornfulness. "I 've heard the same unseemly shouts myself, Dr. Renshaw. They come from class meetings and athletic meetings that are held in my room nearly every day, when the place is not being used for recitations. There is n't a word of truth in the charge against me."

Dr. Renshaw's face clouded, and he cleared his throat uneasily. "Mr. Leigh," he said with dignity, "I told you that the complaint would fail to sum up the whole situation. We may say *Quaestio cadit* in regard to that, if you like. Let us look at it in another light, in the light of the best interests of the Hall and of yourself. There is a question of general fitness which implies no criticism upon yourself, upon your scholarship or character. We are a homogeneous community here, we understand each other and cherish the ideals which this college was built to inculcate. You are a product of an entirely different tradition. You were educated, and have previously taught, in a large university, and this makes it difficult, perhaps impossible, for you to appreciate the needs and the point of view of the small college. The ideal of the professor in a university is self-improvement and personal achievement; but in the small college, the teacher is expected to give, above everything else, personal service and devotion to the interests of his students. He should stand to a large extent *sancti parentis loco.* I do not say that you have consciously failed to improve this opportunity of service; I would say rather that, because of your previous academic experiences, you have failed to see it. The conviction has therefore been forced upon us, in spite of our personal regard for you and our appreciation of your attainments, that you would be happier and more useful in a larger institution, where the point of contact begins and ends in the class-room. In short, I believe you will agree with us that the experiment has not been altogether a success from this point of view. I accept your explanation of the specific charge gladly, and congratulate you upon correcting an impression that did you injustice."

It was Leigh's first meeting in his professional life with that malign experience, injustice in the garb of plausibility, from which there is no appeal. He could not bring himself to acquiesce in silence, though he knew that explanation and protest were vain.

"Dr. Renshaw," he rejoined, in a voice that showed his deep chagrin and sense of wrong, "the proved falsity of the first charge throws suspicion on the second, which is, after all, mainly a conjecture as to my state of mind in regard to St. George's Hall. I must plead guilty to the sin of personal ambition; but how can you expect a man to become entirely identified with the spirit of a place in a few months? It is evident to me that there are certain men who wish me gone, for reasons best known to themselves, and that they have trumped up these absurd charges." He flung himself to his feet indignantly. "This merely illustrates how easy it is to find plausible complaints against any man, and also that even-handed justice is the last thing one should look for in the world."

The president rose also. They were standing almost in darkness, but the afterglow of the sunset, streaming through the western windows and an intervening door, illumined the old man's face. His expression was one of concern, tempered by an humorous appreciation of the youthfulness of Leigh's last remark.

"Young man," he said, putting his hand on Leigh's shoulder, much as if he were admonishing a student, "I beg you not to allow this experience to colour your views with cynicism, for cynicism hurts only the cynic, and fails to take account of all the facts of life. As you have intimated, even-handed justice, inasmuch as it implies omniscience, is an attribute of God alone, but we have not been consciously unjust to you, according to our light. Personally I regret your departure, and I wish to assure you of my confidence in your future. You will doubtless one day look back upon this apparent *contretemps* as a blessing in disguise."

Leigh was far from being mollified by this platitudinous commiseration, though he credited the kindness of heart that gave it birth; and he took leave of the president without further remark. Then he went out into the twilight, more deeply humiliated than ever before in his life.

His loss of Felicity had been sweetened by love's triumph. There was in it the sustaining exaltation of tragedy, and a lingering ray of unreasonable hope; but this reverse was harder to bear, in that he suffered injustice without the possibility of appeal, and was deprived of professional importance in the eyes of the woman he loved, of the position which, slight as it must seem to her, was yet all he had to offset her wealth and social consequence.

There are times when even the stoutest hearts are appalled by the cruel handicap of poverty, when they are tempted to throw over their ideal, to rush into the market-place and make money by fair means or foul, that they may return and shake it in the faces of their foes. Leigh knew well that the possession of means would have made him immune from this attack, would have won him consideration instead of contumely, compliments instead of complaints. The Roman satirist, eating out his soul with bitterness against the insolence of wealth, said that poverty's greatest bane was the fact that it made men ridiculous. He was speaking, to be sure, of clothes; but what could be more ridiculous than an assumption of equality, based upon equal education and breeding, between the poor and the rich?

The young mathematician had not yet established a commanding professional reputation. He had given up a position which was now filled by one of the fifty applicants that had rushed to seize it; his present position at St. George's, he knew, could be filled as easily. He had not the consolation of knowing himself to be valuable to the institution. No one would rise up indignantly and take his part; no one would care what became of him, except Felicity, and pride alone would keep him from appealing to her.

He looked up at the great towers, buttressed by deep shadows, as if he bade them farewell. Already they seemed to take on a strange and unfriendly aspect. This mass of masonry had expressed hostility to him on that September morning, he had read a warning in each impassive or grinning gargoyle, and now, as he passed by, he could almost imagine that they gave sibilant expression to their accomplished malice. He realised how completely he had forgotten that first impression and allowed his imagination to be captured by the place. Where now were the dreams in which he had lately begun to indulge, visions of the finished square, of turret and gable and tower, of gothic gateways, of foliated chapel windows glimmering high in the darkened wall at evening?

Like one stunned by an unexpected blow, he continued his walk, until he came to Birdseye Avenue and paused in front of the bishop's house. Did he really intend to keep his promise never to see Felicity again? If so, why was he even now measuring the distance between himself and those lighted windows? Perhaps some chance would yet throw her in his way; but he would not risk her contempt by following the prompting of his heart and presenting himself before her only three days after his expressed renunciation. Besides, the bishop might be there; and what had he discovered since they last met? His consciousness of wrong-doing in regard to Felicity deprived him of the desire to meet the bishop face to face and to demand an explanation. Was there not, after all, reason enough for the bishop's action, if he knew all? This thought robbed Leigh of the satisfaction of a righteous indignation, which until now he had cherished as justifiable. He was fair enough to admit that he had received what he deserved, on other than professional grounds, and having reached the lowest depth of unhappiness, he began to retrace his steps disconsolately toward the college.

A philosopher once said that every man has in him at least one poem which he could write under the stress of great emotion, and that night Leigh unconsciously exemplified the truth of the saying. It was near the dawn when he descended from the tower, having left upon the table by the telescope this fragmentary record of his vigil.

THE MORNING WATCH

Be resolute, my soul,
And battle till the day,
My strength is manifold,
If only thou art gay;
Since friendship takes its flight,
Since love is far outgrown,
Here, in the silent night,
I watch alone.

And sing a song, my soul,
A bitter song and bright,
While fleeting hours unroll
The enigmatic night;
The saddest souls must sing —
Ah, happy those that weep!
So laugh, till death shall bring
Unending sleep.

Now let me lie in peace
On Nature's passive breast,
Since human love must cease,
And life is all unblest,

And watch the stars outspread
Within the brimming blue —
But Abraham is dead
  Who saw them too.

And millions, ages hence,
Shall watch the steady stars,
And question Why and Whence
Behind their prison bars;
But if no love shall give
A light upon the way,
How can they dare to live
  Until the day?

CHAPTER XVIII

"TWO SISTER VESSELS"

THE January thaw now took on a sinister and unwholesome phase, preparatory to its final retreat before the onslaught of returning winter. The heavy snowfall was reduced to a few discoloured streaks lingering in the deeper ruts and hollows, and the brown earth, never so unlovely, exhaled faint wreaths of vapour that caused old-fashioned folk to shake their heads and to speak of full graveyards. The sun seemed to draw up in the form of mist more and more of the water that had been soaking into the soil. People moved about in a dank haze, that rose gradually to the tops of the houses, until by noontime it had obscured the moist blue sky and turned the sun into a dull-red disk set in a golden aura. There was something ominous in the strange atmosphere thus engendered, in the dimming and distorting of architectural lines, in the muffling of familiar sounds. The unseasonable conditions resembled in some way what in other climates is called earthquake weather, when Nature seems to be throwing a veil over the world to hide the monstrous deed she is about to commit.

Those whose lives were happy, drawing their breath with a sense of oppression, imagined impending trouble, while those with real tragedies to bear now found them almost insupportable.

Early in the day, St. George's Hall looked down from its lofty ridge upon basins of mist that presented the appearance of white lakes in the meadows below. Gradually the tide rose above the long, low hall, until the towers seemed to rest on clouds. Finally the whole mass disappeared, to loom up larger than reality to the eyes of one approaching from the city. As night came on, the lights from the windows cut lurid pathways into the surrounding obscurity. A gradual chill crept along the ground, thinning the fog and disclosing at intervals ghostly glimmerings of the moon.

Through this strange medium two figures were toiling up the street that flanked the northern limit of the campus. Under normal conditions, the second could easily have seen the one in advance, but now his view was obstructed, and though he gained rapidly, he had reached the entrance of the maple walk before the mist in front of him seemed to concentrate into a flitting shadow that resembled a woman's form. The young astronomer had been wandering for hours in a vain search for diversion, and the vision before him, embodying as it did the subject upon which his mind had been concentrated, caused him to stand still in a tumult of emotion. The next moment it was gone, and he believed that he had been visited by an hallucination. Recently, that earlier picture of Felicity beside the lamp had given place in his imagination to one associated with a deeper experience. He had just pictured her in her scarlet cloak and hood; then he had looked up to see the same figure vanishing before his eyes.

A moment's reflection convinced him of the psychic nature of the phenomenon. In all the range of human probabilities, what errand could lead her at ten o'clock on such a night to that lonely hilltop, and on down the road into the country beyond? It was manifest that his own mind had shaped the vision from the pale vapours, and he realised how weary and overwrought he had become. His sensation was now almost one of fear, as if he had seen the ghost of a loved one rising out of the mists of a remote and passionate past. A strange impulse seized him to follow the phantom further, but he was shivering with the penetrating dampness to which he had been long exposed, and instead he continued his way toward his room.

Had he obeyed his impulse, he would soon have overtaken the living form which he imagined to be an apparition of the mind. Felicity did not keep straight ahead, however, to the westward, but paused at the brow of the hill, breathing deep after her long climb, conscious that the rapid beating of her heart was not wholly due to her recent exertion.

It was the prospect of a meeting now imminent that caused the painful tumult in her side and the widening of her dark eyes as she looked up at the saffron blur which marked the position of the moon. Yet there was resolution in her step as she turned southward and took the road that passed between the college and the cliff. In spite of the long thaw, the gravelled track was firm beneath her feet, and she walked rapidly in the direction of the Hall, her face pale and set, her warm breath mingling with the swirling mist.

Leigh was also progressing in the same direction by the almost parallel path between the maples, but somewhat in advance of Felicity, inasmuch as she had climbed to the very summit of the hill before turning, while the course he took extended diagonally across the campus from a point further down. Thus it happened that he had gained his rooms by the time she came opposite his western windows. As she glanced up at them in passing, their location in the wall became more clearly defined by the appearance of a glimmering light within. She saw Leigh, with his hat and coat still on, come from his eastern room, holding a candle in his hand. He stood under the chandelier, raised the candle, and lighted the jets of gas. Then he advanced to the windows, and pulled the curtains down with a decisive motion, that expressed his inward determination to shut out all ghostly imaginings with the night.

Felicity stood for some time regarding the yellow squares in the murky expanse of the wall. She reflected that he might have been very near her in the mist but a few moments before, since he must have entered the grounds by the maple walk. The other path, by the bishop's statue and across the fields, was seldom used in winter, and was now impracticable because of the soggy condition of the turf. The possible results of the meeting, which had evidently been avoided by mere accident, perhaps only by the thickness of the atmosphere, were incalculable, and sent the blood to her cheeks in a sudden glow.

The memory of their last meeting flooded her whole being warmly, to be followed by a dreary realisation of their present position. The very drawing of the curtains between them seemed symbolical, not so much of his expressed determination to see her no more as of the relentlessness of Fate. She believed that he was strong enough to keep his promise, and knew how gladly she would have him break it. Her actual situation at the moment, shut out from him and standing alone in the night, gave her longing an intensity which she had not hitherto experienced. She wondered whether he would have taken her in his arms and kissed her good-bye once more, had he overtaken her upon the hill. Presently she resumed her way, thinking of the man she was leaving there in his lonely tower rather than of the man she was so soon to meet.

Some quarter of a mile further on, she came to a huge button-ball tree that marked the trysting-place. Its great trunk and long branches, spotted with white patches, like scars on the twisted limbs of a giant, confronted her as a hideous and uncanny thing. This tree, the only kind in all the country that lacked beauty of line and colour, received a touch of ghastliness from the atmosphere that enveloped it which was not without its effect upon her imagination, and when she saw the mayor emerge from its shadow, she started as if she were confronted by a highwayman.

"Is it you, Felicity?" he ventured anxiously. "I thought you were never coming."

"Was I late?" she returned. "I did n't mean to be; but let us walk further on. We can talk as we go."

As she caught sight of the eager light in his eyes and noted the intonation of his voice, she divined that his mood was radically different from that which had carried him to her house in hot haste a few mornings before. Then, he was burning with a sense of humiliation, frantic with the thought that she was slipping from his grasp, embittered by baffled ambition, and determined to assert his rights. Now, softer emotions held sway in his heart. The memory of that scene in the opera house had grown less galling. He was soothed by the blandishments of resilient self-esteem and by his friends' more flattering interpretation of the incident. Indeed, looked at from one perspective, it was a most impressive vindication of his official dignity against the slight that had been put upon it. A new point of view had somehow sprung from his brief contact with the President. For the first time, Cobbens and his kind appeared to him the provincials they were. They no longer blocked his whole horizon, like the lion in the way. Dim dreams of wider ambitions, vague exhilarations, stirred within him. He began to think it possible to transcend Warwick. Thus his temper was less bitter than before, his poise was less a pose, the result of a new adjustment of values.

"Felicity," he began, almost happily, "I could n't help thinking, as I stood there waiting for you, how often I have waited in the same way before. Just think of it, Felicity, for years and years! It seems almost a lifetime, so much has happened in the interval. Did you notice this coat and cap? They 're the same I used to wear when you began to take my car rather than any other. A pretty good disguise for the mayor of Warwick, don't you think?"

A pain went through her heart, not for a lost love, but for the vanished dreams of girlhood. The chord he had hoped to touch remained mute. In view of the fact that she believed love to be dead between them, this method of stimulating an outworn romance seemed sentimental and insincere. Had he loved her, she might well have thought it boyish and pathetic. What he spoke of as a disguise had seemed so natural as to escape her notice; and this indicated the height from which she had never really descended and could now never descend. He had lost his great opportunity of appearing the mayor in her eyes. It was no part of her plan, however, to emphasise this difference between them, for she had seen what vindictive passions a realisation of the fact might arouse within him. Full of the warmth of his own emotions, he failed to grasp the significance of her unresponsiveness.

"But have you spoken to the bishop yet, as you promised to?" he asked eagerly.

"No, I have n't — I could n't, yet."

"I'm glad of it," he returned buoyantly. "I wanted another chance to see you before you spoke to him, to set myself right with you. I did n't mean to threaten you, Felicity. I knew that was no way to win forgiveness, but I was n't myself. Can't you see how the long waiting for you almost drove me mad? But now we 're together again in the old way, and I feel that I can explain everything so that you can understand. Everything that 's happened lately to keep us apart seems a dream, something utterly unreal. Come, Felicity, don't you think our meeting was rather a cold one, after such a long separation? Have n't I won the prize you set for me to win, and are you going to deny me my reward?" He made as if he would put his arm about her, but she shrank away with such emphatic and spontaneous denial that he desisted in chagrin. "After all there has been between us," he protested, "are you going to let a passing flirtation outweigh the fact that we are man and wife?"

Felicity had somehow not anticipated that he would attempt to kiss her, and the movement set her quivering as at an outrage.

"Has there really been so much between us, Tom?" she asked. "Does n't it all seem a great mistake, which it would be better to acknowledge frankly, rather than to assume the existence of something that has ceased to exist?"

"And whose mistake was it?" he demanded, with sudden fierceness. "Tell me that."

"Mine," she admitted. "You know how I came to make it — the narrowness of my life that yet seemed so broad, the insignificance of the artificial men I knew, the longing for romance, for a love affair with a flavour of risk and adventure in it. You must n't hold me now to that girl's dream, since you were the one that waked me from it. You showed me first that we really did n't care for each other. If you loved me, why did you take up with the first pretty servant-girl you met?"

She had not meant to recall their difference in class, but in Lena's station in life lay the chief sting of his offence, and the fact could not be concealed.

"Why? Why?" he echoed. "Because she loved me more than you did, — if you ever loved me at all, — because you starved my heart and made me feel that you were not my wife at all, but only a patroness who had taken me up to make something of me, with an indefinite promise of a reward at the end of it, if I would be a good little boy and do as you told me, and keep out of mischief, and win a prize. What kind of a position is that to put a man in?"

"I supposed the reward was worth working and waiting for," she retorted coolly. "You 're whipping yourself into a passion now, Tom, but you know in your heart that my cruelty to you, if it was cruelty, was not as great as your cruelty to Lena. I would have kept my promise, and you know it, if you had not yourself forfeited all claim to my respect. I supposed you were a strong man" —

"And have I no wrongs?" he broke in. "Did you think I was n't a man at all, but just a lump of putty to be moulded by your hands? How do you suppose I felt when we were married in New York, and you left me at the very door of the church?"

"I did n't realise till then what I had done," she gasped, the panic of that moment returning to her, "and I had to leave you."

"But I did realise it," he cried bitterly, "as any man would have realised it. I realised nothing else. I walked the streets, wondering whether it was a practical joke. You made a fool of me. You did n't tell me beforehand that you were going to play such a trick on me."

"Trick!"

"Yes, trick! What else, in the name of God, was it? It seemed like nothing else, at first. I could hardly remember what you said, — you spoke so confused and were so anxious to get away, — but finally I figured it out that you were just scared, and that I would have to wait a little while for you to get used to the idea that you were my wife." He paused, choked by emotion. "I waited, God knows," he went on, "waited for nearly three years. And what did I get? A few stolen meetings and a few kisses, not very genuine ones at that. Somehow you carried the thing out in your father's high-handed way. I could n't break through and get at you. Every time we met I thought I would, but instead I took advice and promises, until it became a habit of mind. I became tired of the mockery, and heart-sick. You made yourself seem less and less my wife. And when I did n't see you for weeks at a time, and when I was filled with resentment, I met Lena" —

"And did the very thing that lost me to you forever," she supplemented relentlessly.

They had come to a point where the road ascended and ran along the margin of a great stone quarry, from which the material that went into the building of St. George's Hall had been hewn. The air had grown momently colder, condensing the mist, which now floated away in milky wreaths, disclosing the full moon shining down upon the wide sweep of the valley toward the west. Stung to madness by her words, he stopped and turned upon her, but his answer died on his lips, for he looked into a face of such surpassing beauty that he seemed never to have seen it truly before. The gathered crimson hood invested it with something of the sorcery that Leigh had felt, that any man must have felt. The divinity that had hitherto hedged about the bishop's daughter vanished for the first time like a vanishing mist, and left her only an irresistible woman standing alone with him in the moonlight.

The impulse that swept over him was one of sheer desire. Lena had taught him what a woman's kisses could be, kisses such as Felicity had never given him, such as he would now have from her as his right. Before she could anticipate his intention, he had seized her roughly and strained her to his breast with a violence that hurt.

"Felicity!" he cried in savage delight, "I could make you come to me now. You are my wife — I tell you, my wife!"

She managed to free herself from his grasp, and having retreated a few steps, she faced him, white with anger. Leigh's embrace had been passionate, and had fired her blood with an answering emotion, but Emmet's was an assault, arousing within her an implacable resentment.

"I am not your wife!" she cried, quivering. "Marriage or no marriage, I am not your wife, and never will be. After what has passed between you and that girl, how dared you kiss me — how dared you? When you came down to me — the other morning — from her room — and found me in the hall — didn't I see in your face — in your tears — the state of your mind?"

In her heart she believed it probable that he had wronged Lena to the greatest extent that a man can wrong a woman. He did not divine the extent of her suspicions, however, and unfortunately his next words deepened them to practical certainty.

"God help me," he groaned. "You 've told the truth. You 're not my wife and never have been, but you 've kept her from being, poor girl. You 've made me wrong her — perhaps kill her, for all I know."

Something of the wild and tragic strain that lies so deep in the Celtic race now rose to the surface and transformed him. He took a step forward and seized her by the wrist.

"I could end it all at once by dragging you with me over the cliff, and I don't know but I will!"

Powerless in his grasp, she stood on the very edge of the rock that fell away sheer before them to the depth of two hundred feet. He looked down into the basin, showing here and there in the hollows a pool mirrored in the moonlight, and shapeless masses of machinery and stone. Whether he had really been in earnest, or had only imagined himself to be, the vision of that cruel abyss made him pause, shuddering. But Felicity had not taken her eyes from his face. Now he turned to meet them, not distended with fear, but fixed upon him in discerning scorn. She even made no effort to free her wrist, but stood poised on the brink with an apparent unconcern, that reëstablished her ascendancy as if by magic.

"You 're merely acting now, Tom," she said calmly. "You don't want to die, and you have no intention of killing me. You 've got too much to live for, to throw your life away in that fashion. When you 've had time to think it over, you 'll discover that it was n't love that made you want me, but ambition. The love was gone long ago, but the ambition remains. You want to live for that."

He dropped her wrist, and cowered away from the cliff as if he were shrinking from a nightmare horror, while she began to move slowly in the direction of the college. The very act of retreat aroused within her the emotion which, curiously enough, she had not experienced in the crisis of danger. It was not fear that made her flee, but her flight that produced the fear; and the possibility of the crime, the grewsome picture it suggested, flashed upon her with such sinister power that her knees weakened and caused her to stumble. He overtook her in a few long strides, and walked beside her in dumb penitence.

"You 'll never forgive me now, Felicity," he said, when he could bear the silence no longer, "never — never!"

"We 'll not talk of forgiveness any more on either side," she returned wearily. "We 're merely going round and round in a circle, without arriving at any conclusion."

His own nature shared her reaction from intense emotion to indifference, and again silence fell between them. Apparently, they were scarcely better able to understand each other than if they spoke in different languages, and each took refuge in incommunicable thoughts. It would always be thus, she reflected, if they lived together; no community of interests, herself living in a region apart, which he was generations short of being able to enter. Nothing would remain but practical politics, and already she sickened of the sordid subject. Unionism, public ownership of public utilities versus private privilege, charges and counter-charges of political corruption, problems of taxation — such things would constitute his sole interest in life and the gist of his conversation. It was not enough that he talked intelligently, even eloquently, on these subjects. Her active mind had already exhausted their possibilities, and what to her was a mere by-play of the intellect was to him the be-all and end-all of existence. Of the books she had given him, he understood and appropriated only those parts that related to his subject. All the rest was lost: the literary quality, the atmosphere, the historic perspective. To him it could never mean anything that Plato saw the Parthenon.

This fact indicated a limitation, a reason why he could never develop from the politician into the statesman, why, for example, she knew that he was not the kind of man to become a cabinet officer or ambassador. She would be merely the wife of a mayor, or at the most, of a governor or representative. And she knew she would never respect his opinions, that he was one who might champion crude and undigested theories, theories which men trained as her father and Leigh and Cardington had been trained would weigh in the balance and find wanting. How rashly she had condemned this training, how effectually her experiment had cured her of radicalism, she herself now saw clearly. The problem of liberty within conventionality was still unsolved, and she had beaten her wings against the bars in vain.

On the other hand, just as she had once endowed Emmet with possibilities he never possessed, so now, in her disillusion, she lost sight of those primitive virtues that would always make him a force for good in whatever level he was destined to reach. Unjust to him in the beginning, she was unjust to him still.

Felicity Wycliffe was a mystery to herself no less than to others. The normal functions of her sex had dropped so far below her ken, in the course of her complicated development, as to seem negligible. Beginning with this negation, she had passed rapidly on to an attitude of universal scepticism, to which religion was merely a matter of taste, and prayer was a psychological phenomenon. She was not one to lend herself to the constructive dreams of men, or to attach herself to their theories. Her weariness of her father's academic plans presaged her disillusion in regard to Emmet's career, even if he had been what she first imagined him. Her colossal egotism demanded everything from a man, and was prepared to give nothing in return, except the precarious possession of herself. Yet what man, fascinated by the mysterious unrest and nocturnal splendour of her eyes, would not gladly pay for that possession whatever price she might demand?

Presently, when their silence had again become awkward, she began to speak of impersonal things; of the strange transformation of the night, lately so oppressive and obscure, now so dazzlingly serene; of the carrying power of sound in the stillness about—a dog's barking, the distant notes of the bell in the tower of the First Church striking the hour of eleven. As they passed the Hall, she saw that the windows of Leigh's room were again dark, and imagined that he had taken advantage of the clearing atmosphere to ascend to the top of the tower and resume his observations. Emmet, following the direction of her eyes upward, divined her thought.

"The professor is probably looking at the moon through his telescope," he remarked.

"Yes," she answered, in a tone as casual as his own, "he would doubtless not lose this opportunity of examining the cracks that have appeared recently on its surface, if he can see them with that lens, which is n't likely. They are said to be hundreds, or even thousands, of miles long, and only a few yards in width."

Her knowledge of such a recent astronomical discovery confirmed his suspicion that she and Leigh saw much of each other. Knowing the man's infatuation with her by his own confession, he now became convinced that she returned it; that she had used his fault in regard to Lena Harpster to justify its counterpart in herself. Correct in his main surmise, he was nevertheless mistaken concerning the source of her information, a short press despatch from the Lick Observatory which he had overlooked in the morning paper.

He was in no mood to renew the struggle with her on the basis of these suspicions, but laid them away in his heart for future consideration. About to reply indifferently, his words were checked by a sudden fit of coughing. The long exposure in the penetrating fog and the subsequent increase in the cold were producing their effect, and as they descended the hill, his cough became more frequent and severe.

She was concerned for him, much as she would have been concerned for any one under similar circumstances. Some hereditary instinct, a tradition of professional humanity, moved her to expressions of sympathy and advice; and when they arrived before her house, she insisted that he come in and get something warm to drink before exposing himself further to the cold night air. He followed her obediently through the dimly lighted hall into the dining-room, wondering at her apparent indifference to the possibility of meeting either Lena or the bishop.

The indifference was real. Wearied of her own efforts to disentangle herself from the meshes of her plight, she was ready to challenge chance. Had her father been sitting up for her, she would have led her husband into his presence, prepared to take the consequences. But as chance decided otherwise, she accepted the respite, not without relief.

She heated water over a small alcohol lamp, which she placed on the table, and called his attention to the reflection of the green flame in the polished mahogany surface. There was that in her manner and conversation which deprived her act of the tone of personal service. She watched him sip his whiskey with a judicial expression, overruling the protest his principles suggested. She poured for herself a glass of wine and sat opposite him, the tall wax candles between them, and asked him for the first time how he found his duties as mayor. The question seemed to occur to her as one which ordinary courtesy should have prompted her to ask before.

Emmet felt her aloofness, and met it with unexpected dignity. In his answer he spoke of Bat Quayle, and of a plan forming against him among his enemies in the board of aldermen to lay all his appointments on the table indefinitely, and thus to make his administration a failure. But he did not assume, as he would once have done, that she was vitally interested, and his remarks were fragmentary.

Felicity noticed his sombre mood and attributed it partly to his physical condition, little dreaming how bitterly he resented, not her kindness, but the manner of it. It was the old grievance over again. Like the bishop, like her whole class, she was unconsciously patronising, he reflected, even when she meant to be charitable. For the time, at least, he asked nothing from her, and this indifference gave him more of a tone of the world, more the air of a gentleman, than she had ever seen in him before. For once the tables were turned, and it was he who appeared enigmatical. If he were any longer conscious of his conductor's uniform, it was a proud consciousness, and he seemed to wear it like the insignia of a soldier. When he left, it was without further appeals or personalities, but with brief thanks for her kindness and good wishes.

She stood and watched him going down the walk in the moonlight, the black shadows of the bare branches falling one after another across his shoulders, and suddenly the thought that this was her husband who was leaving her thus came over her with a wave of irresistible emotion. Her throat ached with a piercing realisation of the tragedy of it, and without stopping to think, she ran down the steps and pursued him, panting and almost weeping. He turned at the sound of her hurrying steps, puzzled by the pursuit and on his guard against her influence. He was suspicious of her intentions now, and waited for her to explain the meaning of this mercurial change.

"Tom," she said in a choking voice, laying a detaining hand upon his sleeve. But she was possessed by an emotion, rather than by a thought that could be expressed in words, and so she stood thus awhile in silence. His grim immobility and manly self-containment brought back some flavour of that early romance, when he, unaware as yet of her fancy, paid her slight heed, and for that very reason appealed to her imagination.

The change in her mood seemed to flow into him like a solvent that broke up his resentment and suspicion. That realisation of their relationship which had sent her after him was conveyed in the thrilling note of her voice when she uttered his name, and though at first he had refused to understand it thus, her lingering touch became its full interpreter. They searched each other's eyes mutely, and he knew before he began to speak that she was his.

"Felicity," he said, his eyes gathering an intense, exultant light, "you 've come after me of your own accord, and you 've got to abide by it. You 've played fast and loose with me long enough. Don't go back into the house — come with me now — you 're my wife — why should n't you come with me? Whose business is it but our own? I say you must!"

With an effort she withdrew her eyes from his face and looked back at the open door of her father's house, imprinting every detail upon her memory: the dull red carpet, the antique chairs, the stairway hung with old engravings, climbing upward to the room which she was never again to enter as before. The temptation assailed her to cut once and for all the Gordian knot, and obeying its impulse, she began to walk down the flagging beside him.

At the street she paused once more and pressed her hands piteously against her heart, trying to think. This was the spot where Leigh had kissed her, and his ghost seemed to confront her there in the cold moonlight, looking at her with sad, reproachful eyes, eyes full of a deep, ethereal passion that burned this other passion to ashes. This, then, was the explanation of her vacillation. If his mere memory could stay her thus, while she vibrated to the influence of the man that was present, she must love him indeed. She looked up and saw Emmet's face distinctly, already hardening with new suspicion, without a trace of tenderness, marked only by the ravages of disappointment. By contrast she remembered that other face. She felt again Leigh's kisses and heard his murmured words of love.

"No, Tom," she said, shrinking back. "I will not go with you—I am not your wife."

Her tone was final, but his passion, newly awakened, was terrible in its imperious demands. He could scarcely carry her off by force, and yet for one moment such seemed to be his intention. He took a step toward her, his hand raised as if to strike her down, then stopped.

"We'll see about that," he retorted, with a strange, short laugh. He would have said more and disclosed his further intention by a final threat, but another fit of coughing caught at his throat, and before he could find his voice again she was well on her way toward the house, fleeing between the trees like a frightened bird. He stood still until the door closed behind her.

"She must be a devil," he said aloud. "She stirs up the devil in me. She makes me bad."

Could any one have seen the malign record which his experience with her had traced upon his face, he would have been forced to admit the justice of this accusation. He walked slowly away, striving to reckon with his tempestuous emotions, but he could not pass beyond the limit of the grounds.

"I was going away quietly enough," he muttered, "when she came chasing after me. Why did n't she let me go, or else come with me?"

He stopped short, as a sudden thought flashed upon him. Then he looked up at the windows of Lena's room. They were dark; but the windows of Felicity's room, immediately below, now shone with a saffron glow behind their curtains. He regarded them only to reflect how he hated the woman they concealed from his view, and then wondered whether Lena were asleep. He took out his watch and held it up to the moon. As he did so, he saw that the hands pointed at midnight, and simultaneously the bell from the First Church began to ring the hour.

If Lena were still awake, she might possibly be lingering in the kitchen, perhaps with some new lover. She had a right to do so, but the very thought filled him with a fury of jealousy. It would be an easy matter, he reflected, to tiptoe down the driveway behind the trees, to gain the shadow of the house, and to peep into one of the kitchen windows. Of course they were dark, but he wished to be assured of it. Let him once discover that the house was closed for the night, and he would be content.

As he began to put his plan into execution, gliding stealthily from tree to tree and pausing to look and listen from the shelter of each shadow, he was acutely aware of the fact that it was the mayor of Warwick who was doing this thing. The realisation could not stay his progress or change his purpose. After all, she would probably not be there; and if the bishop's coachman or some servant should come out and find him, his explanation was ready. The driveway passed by the bishop's stable and on through the square to the street beyond. He would say that he was making a short cut, and the explanation would be plausible. From time to time he stifled a cough with difficulty, and it was this difficulty alone that almost persuaded him to turn back.

It was by no strange coincidence or accident that Lena remained reading by the lamp in the large, deserted kitchen. She might have been seen there, as Emmet saw her now, almost every evening after the others had gone to bed, poring over some paper-covered novel that depicted a life of romance quite different from the dull monotony of her own days. But though she herself was wide awake with the interest of the story, her good angel had gone to sleep, and left her there, unwarned, to face her peril alone.

Emmet ventured to thrust his head for a moment into the bar of light that cut the deep shadow of the house, and saw that his most extravagant hopes were fulfilled. He saw also that she was prettily dressed, with a red velvet ribbon about her throat, her hair showing a careful and coquettish arrangement. He was convinced that she had dressed herself thus for a lover, and he meant to call her to account.

Little by little he crept closer, until he stood beside the window, his back against the wall. He had only to turn and lean forward and look her in the face. His eyes searched the wide stretches of the lawn in vain for a sign of life. The stable was dark, the house was silent. Only he and Lena were awake. No thought of pity for her softened his heart at that moment. He only chafed inwardly at a memory of his stupid and mistaken loyalty to Felicity.

Lena Harpster was one of those timid natures that are paralysed by sudden surprise or fear. Had it not been so, the apparition of his face against the pane, his intense and hungry gaze, would have caused her to wake the house with a scream. But she sat staring at him with her wide grey eyes, like one turned to stone, until she saw that her first impression of a burglar was false, and then that her lover was beckoning her to come.

She had never resisted his will, and she did not do so now. When she had comprehended who it was, and his meaning, she glanced behind her with instinctive caution; she rose from her chair and tiptoed to the farther door, where she looked and listened until satisfied. Then she returned, placed her hands on the table, and leaned over the lamp.

Emmet saw the light of the flame illumine the pink curve of her lips as she formed them for a breath. He saw the upward shadow of her features against the golden mist of her hair, and then the vision was swallowed up in darkness. A moment later the outside door was softly opened, and as softly closed.

CHAPTER XIX

FATHER AND DAUGHTER

WHEN the bishop and his daughter met at the breakfast-table the next morning, the air was full of unpleasant possibilities. She came in by way of the kitchen with the news that Lena had gone home on a plea of illness, and though he was concerned for the girl, the necessity of breaking in a new maid to his ways added to his evident irritation of mind.

There was none of the bright-eyed vitality and serene spiritual tone that follows nights free from care. Felicity observed that her father omitted his customary inquiries in regard to her rest, that the morning paper, the usual basis of comment at breakfast, lay unopened beside his plate, and guessed correctly that the explanation she must make could no longer be postponed. His bewilderment and suspicions had reached a point that would drive him to take the initiative, and he was only waiting for a favourable opening.

The crafty expression of his eyes filled her with irritation and resentment. How well she knew the trend of his thoughts! Others might find him inscrutable, but she knew him through and through.

In their long and subtle struggle concerning the disposition of her property, in the question whether she would or would not help him to build up the college, she had always been sustained by a peculiar loyalty to her mother, who had passed her fortune on to her daughter unimpaired. This was a practical declaration of her own will in the matter, and Felicity accepted it as she might have accepted a sacred trust. She barely remembered her mother as a shadowy and benign being floating through the great rooms of the house. During her childhood, a certain angel in one of the windows of St. George's Church had somehow been confused in her mind with that figure, and had inspired her with vague awe. These dim memories and childish fancies had crystallised in later years into an appreciation of the common interests that would doubtless have been theirs, had her mother lived.

No hint of this hidden psychological drama had ever reached the bishop's ken. His daughter's attitude seemed her mother's obstinacy and worldliness reincarnated, and he was distressed also by more dangerous elements, by inexplicable sympathies, antipathies, and rebellions, until the whole fabric of his careful plans seemed destined to fall in ruins.

As the sunlight came stealing in across the table, striking prismatic colours from the glassware, he shaded his eyes with his hand and sharply ordered the maid to draw the curtain.

"What is the matter with you this morning, father?" Felicity asked severely. "Are you ill?"

The corners of her mobile lips were curled slightly upward, with just a suggestion of scorn. Unhappiness is no great promoter of the courtesies of life, and if she was conscious of wrong-doing, she was far from being on the defensive.

"Yes," he answered, "I am ill. I am sick at heart."

"If you will drink coffee, and keep on smoking those strong cigars" —

He eyed her so intently over the rim of his shaking cup that she left the sentence uncompleted. In spite of her tragic mood, his glare of resentment aroused within her an inclination to laugh.

"You see how your nerves are affected," she finished.

It was not the first time this subject had come up between them, but hitherto he had denied with urbane mendacity the ill results of his favourite indulgences. Now his control was gone.

"They are not affected," he retorted, while the rattling of the cup against the saucer disproved his declaration. It was with difficulty that he could extricate his fingers from the handle without breaking the delicate ware. "Or if they are," he went on, "you misstate the cause, deliberately, as I believe."

She opened her eyes incredulously, and pushing back his chair, he rose petulantly to his feet.

"Felicity, I am disappointed in you — more than disappointed — wounded — cut to the heart — scandalised!"

He turned away, then, coming back, he seized the morning paper, and with a parting glance of reproach went into his study and closed the door. His words, his manner of retreat, were a challenge to follow which she meant to accept. A few moments later, she flung back the door of her father's study and confronted him, intensely angry, and strikingly beautiful in her anger.

"Scandalised!" she echoed, as if no time had elapsed since he uttered the word. "What do you mean by that?"

The apparition was not unexpected, but the bishop, glancing over the top of his paper, managed to convey his surprise with the subtlety of which he was master. Chagrined by his conduct at the table, he had fortified himself in the interim against a renewal of the struggle.

"I used the word advisedly," he replied with dignity. "You might come in and close the door. It is just as well, perhaps, not to take the servants into our confidence."

She accepted the suggestion and sat confronting him expectantly, her anger ebbing away imperceptibly in the pause until only the underlying dread remained.

"Who was the man that came in with you last night?" he asked with authority. "You went out about half-past nine o'clock to Mrs. Parr's, as I supposed, and returned at midnight, not alone. I might have thought that Mr. Parr had seen you home, but I looked from my window, and though I could n't hear what you said — but never mind that. You will do me the justice to admit that I have never pried into your affairs or actions. Until recently such a question as I have now thought it my duty to ask would never have occurred to me."

"It was Mayor Emmet," she answered in a thin voice. She was panic-stricken, and her heart beat to suffocation.

"Emmet!" he echoed.

"Who did you think it was?" she asked, with a wan smile.

"Never mind — never mind," he returned impatiently. "Ah, I begin to see more clearly. What was it you said he wanted with you here the other morning? Some trivial thing — I can't remember. Now I want to know at once — I have a right to know — whether there is anything between you and that man. It is n't possible — I am ashamed to ask — but your face betrays you. You are n't — Felicity — you can't imagine yourself in love with such a fellow?"

"Perhaps it would be better if I could," she answered desperately, "but I can't. Father, you must control yourself. I used to think myself in love with him, and — and — and I was very foolish" —

"How foolish?" His face had grown white, and he steadied his hands on the arms of his chair. "Don't torture me, Felicity. Tell me the worst at once."

"I married him."

At the words his paleness became ashen, and the rigidity of his features was so ghastly that, forgetting everything else in her alarm, she ran to his assistance. He waved her away angrily.

"No — I am not going to faint — and I don't want anything to drink."

She resumed her chair obediently, and waited for him to ask more questions. Apparently he was unwilling or unable to do so, and the silence seemed interminable, though in reality it lasted but a few minutes. During that short time the bishop's thoughts ranged with characteristic rapidity over every aspect of the situation. Emmet as a son-in-law! First of all, the fact that he was the mayor of Warwick, a fact which the bishop had hitherto belittled, now presented itself as a mitigating circumstance. Then the thought that he was a Catholic followed immediately, to suggest complications and humiliations which the bishop's large experience enabled him to see with fatal distinctness. What was the man's paltry office compared with this stupendous fact? Nothing — a mere accident — a passing honour that would probably be plucked from him two years hence, leaving him — what? Tom

Emmet, ex-professional baseball player and street-car conductor, out of a job, no longer mayor, but always a Catholic, married to the richest woman in Warwick, and that woman his daughter, the daughter of Bishop Wycliffe!

It was inevitable that he should look at the situation from the point of view of the bishop rather than from that of the father simply. Had she been a son who had "gone over to Rome" after taking Anglican orders, the bishop's professional humiliation would not have been as great as that which now stared him in the face. It would have been a keen disappointment indeed, but lightened by the prospect of his son's preferment in an ancient communion. There would still have been the possibility of a career for the boy, a career which his father could watch, or at least anticipate, with emotions of pride; for the bishop was too purely an ecclesiastic to underestimate professional success in the Church of Rome. The career of a Cardinal Newman, for example, was one that challenged his respect, however much he regretted the loss of such talents to the Anglican faith, however forcibly he might characterise the convert's action as apostasy.

But how different the actual case, how infinitely worse! Felicity's fortune was lost indeed to the great cause for which he had laboured a lifetime. Could he not imagine the delicately malicious triumph of the Catholic bishop, by whose side he had so recently sat on equal terms? Did he not know how the man would begin to scheme for the fortune of Emmet's wife from the very day the marriage was published, how he would strive to reach Felicity through her husband, flattering, threatening, moving heaven and earth to get the money for his parochial schools, his nunneries, his cathedral? Only one as intensely partisan as the bishop, and with his reasons for partisanship, could divine his sensations as he viewed the picture thus presented to his mind — the troops of Irish or Italian children screaming in their dusty playground, watched by the monkish forms of their teachers. And the other possibility had been St. George's Hall, the miniature Oxford of America!

But even if the money should not go in such a direction through the hands of Felicity, — and the bishop realised that a husband would not be likely to succeed where a father had failed, — it would ultimately reach the hands of her children. Baffled by the parents, the authorities of the Catholic Church would transfer their efforts to the children from their very cradles, and would bring the game to earth at last.

The thought of children reminded the bishop how far he had gone on the facts he knew thus far. What were they? That Felicity had married Emmet, that she did not love him, that she already repented the deed! It was characteristic of his mental processes that the consideration of love had been overlooked in his first agonised speculations, but now he clutched at it as a drowning man clutches at a straw.

It was a wonderfully interesting face that he turned upon her, transformed by his complicated emotions — his mechanical smile of suffering, humiliation, scorn, disgust; the sudden leaping into his eyes of a desperate hope. The master spirit within him was already awaking from the stunning blow she had dealt. Every faculty of his acute mind was once more alert, hungering for more facts, all the facts, as a basis of future action.

He spoke not one word of the terrible anger that racked him like a physical nausea. Even in this crisis, his temperament and training held fast. Reproaches on his part would only drive her more surely to the place from which she seemed desirous to return. His flurry at the table had shown him how she could match anger with anger, and overpower him by sheer vitality. An instinct of self-preservation, and an astuteness that now reached its final triumph, pointed the wiser way.

"Then you feel that you have made a mistake, Felicity?" he questioned. "I have long divined a great trouble in you, though of course this is far beyond my worst fears. If I am to be of any help to you, I must know all."

For the first time in her life she felt that her father might be her friend, her refuge in trouble.

Hungry for sympathy and understanding, — she knew not how hungry till now, — she told her story, beginning impetuously and with starting tears. The bishop listened attentively to the facts, dismissing from his mind her point of view, her reasons for dissatisfaction with her life. Such crude immaturity he had encountered a thousand times, though he had never suspected it in her.

The only facts that concerned him were: that the marriage had never really been consummated; that there was no question of a child to consider; that Felicity was anxious to escape from the man in whose clutches she had placed herself; and that there were grounds for divorce. Emmet himself might be induced — purchased — to bring action on the ground of desertion. To be sure, such a cause was not acknowledged by the Church as valid, but the bishop was prepared to lay aside his prejudice in this particular case. Not for a moment did he think of holding his daughter to her mistake, as soon as he knew the facts in the case. But she made no mention of Leigh.

As the dangers with which he had at first seen himself threatened became less formidable, and the way of escape suggested itself, his wonder at her stupendous selfishness increased. What manner of woman had he reared and educated with such care? In spite of the restraints of his questions and comments, incredulous scorn was written in his expression and in the gleam of his eyes. It was much that she had not been physically coarse, but her psychic equation was beyond his solving.

Felicity could not fail to be conscious of this growing antagonism, and the warmth of emotion with which she had begun her explanation cooled with every word. Her gratitude vanished, to give way to implacable resentment at his attitude of virtuous superiority. Her judgment of him was no less bitter than that she received. Angry reproaches would have stung her less than this courteous contempt.

"And how many persons are in this secret?" he asked finally.

Mr. Emmet has taken Mr. Leigh into his confidence, I believe," she answered, a faint colour creeping into her face.

"Ah, Leigh," he returned, thrown off his guard by surprise. He thought he saw now what her intimacy with the young professor really meant. She was pledging him to secrecy, and the young man had now the motive of revenge to turn and reveal what he knew.

"It would perhaps be better to keep him in the college, after all," he mused.

"What do you mean, father?" she demanded. "To keep him in the college? You had n't asked him to go?"

To this question he made no reply, but she saw confusion plainly written in his face.

"I naturally supposed that he was a fortune hunter"—

She rose to her feet, flaming with an anger that appalled him. "You asked him to go," she cried, "because you thought I might marry him, and not give my mother's money and mine to the college! A fortune hunter! It does n't seem to me, father, that you have much cause to talk about fortune hunting!"

The taunt stung him to the quick, and his face grew scarlet and livid by turns. Never had this question come to an open issue and caused an explosion like the present.

"I am not a fortune hunter," he said raspingly. "If you are so dead to the most inspiring of God's works, yours be the blame, Felicity, and yours the condemnation."

"I have no idea of marrying Mr. Leigh," she went on passionately, "but one thing I can tell you once for all. If you think I am going to give one cent to the college, you are utterly mistaken! Don't I know your plans? Have n't I seen the drift of your casual remarks about the glory of serving God? I know you would have me give every cent I possess to the college and become a deaconess—repent of my sins—retire from the world. You already see an opportunity in my mistake to profit by my repentance. Oh, I know all the choice phrases by heart! You never loved my mother, nor me, but you wanted the money for your St. George's Hall. It was you that drove me into this marriage. God knows, I admit I was wrong, but I made the mistake in a frantic desire for fresh air, for some other atmosphere than the stuffy gloom of churches and seminaries and colleges. What do I care for that miserable little college on the hill, full of your good little boys with their churchly conceits and bowings and deadness? I want life, and I mean to have it. I will spend my money as I see fit — for travel — for clothes — for luxury — for anything that strikes my fancy — but never — never — never — for that college!"

A wild impulse swept over her to seize something and break it in fragments on the floor, but seeing nothing fragile at hand in that book-lined room, she stood still, trembling like an aspen leaf. The bishop, little realising that she was driven to this extraordinary transport by his treatment of Leigh, looked at her in stupefaction. It seemed to him that her mother stood before him once more, though she had never acted thus; but the mental attitude was the same. The mother had thwarted his plans by leaving her money to the daughter, and now the daughter would spend it as she willed. It was like a second defeat at the hands of the same woman. And this was the flower he had cherished with such pride, now scentless of spirituality and dead at the roots! He rose to his feet, suddenly an old man, utterly bereft, and shook a trembling finger in her face.

"You lack nothing of filling up your cup of wickedness," he quavered, "but that you have refrained from making a physical attack upon me. Felicity, God will punish you!"

The corners of her beautiful lips curled upward in cruel scorn, and she swept from the room, slamming the door behind her. Presently he heard the door of her own room closed with equal force, not once, but twice, as if she had opened it again, and again slammed it shut, to give adequate expression to her feelings. Completely bewildered, he wandered into the hall, reached mechanically for his hat and coat, and went out into the street.

Instinctively he turned his steps toward St. George's Hall, as if from its contemplation he could derive comfort. Something, at least, had been done toward realising his ideal, though far less than he had hoped to accomplish. Many a graduate had gone forth from beneath the shadow of that stately tower to win fame and applause in the great world. The bishop knew most of them, and was known and loved by all. There were bishops among them, and clergymen, and judges, and physicians, and some who had freely given their promising young lives in the service of their country. He counted over the names, as a miser counts his gold. His boys! It was such as these, their successors, whom his daughter characterised with scorn, impatient of the passing fads and fancies common to their age, of an immaturity which she herself had exemplified so much less venially.

Musing thus, he traversed the length of Birdseye Avenue, saluting those who passed him with absent-minded courtesy. At length he raised his eyes and looked up the hill to the long, low roof against the cloudless sky. For the thousandth time his eyes kindled at the sight, for the thousandth time he experienced the artistic satisfaction of the connoisseur in collegiate architecture, and mentally limned the remainder of the plan. His sensations were like those of a skilled musician who has heard the first movement of a masterly sonata and is left to imagine the perfect whole. The sun, now mounting toward the zenith, was shortening the shadows of the tower on the slate roof that shone in the bright atmosphere like dull silver. Not a student was in sight, and the place seemed to share the drowsy influence of the noontime.

Motionless, and leaning heavily on his cane, the bishop's mood grew warm, as if it travelled upward with the sun. His dream, now destined to remain unfulfilled, had not been one merely of stone and brick and mortar. His spirit was akin to that of the cathedral builders of the Middle Ages. They might drive the people in harness to accomplish their purpose, but that purpose was to erect a splendid temple to their God, a symbol of human aspiration toward the divine.

The bishop reflected with pride that if he had measurably failed, he had yet planned greatly. He had taken his stand firmly on the ideal, defying the utilitarian spirit of his time and country. It was nothing to him that the money which disappeared in the rearing of that splendid fragment could have been spent for humbler structures which practical men would have called more useful. Useful! He hated the word. As if a beautiful thing employed in the service of God were not useful in exact proportion to its beauty! If the churchmen of America had not been inspired by this fair and brave beginning to complete the work, the fault was theirs. He had pointed them the way.

And how had he merited his wife's indifference, his daughter's reproaches? He had not desired the money for himself, he had used no undue influence, he had forged no will; he had merely striven to make them realise their stewardship, to inspire them with his own ideal. In this effort he could find no grounds for self-accusation; on the contrary, the effort was a merit he might lay with humble pride before his God, when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed.

Presently he resumed his way, until he stood directly opposite the towers, at the foot of the path which crossed the intervening meadows. Here the gateway was to have been built, similar to that of Trinity College, Cambridge, with flanking towers and a statue, perhaps of himself, standing above the portal. At the thought the bishop smiled ironically, and began a tentative progress up the hill.

The later hours of the night had been cold and the ground was still fairly firm, even under the softening influence of the noonday sun. As he went further, the students began to come from their recitations and to disperse toward their various rooms. One figure, however, detached itself from the rest and struck out across the upper campus in the direction of the bronze statue of the founder, who stood with hand outstretched in perennial blessing toward the hall which one of his successors had reared. That successor now caught sight of a head and shoulders emerging above the rim of the plateau, until a man's full length came into view and rapidly descended the slope. Then the bishop recognised Leigh. His greeting to the young man was affable, and his pause an invitation.

"You are adventurous to come this way," he remarked, prodding the earth with his cane. "This crust will scarcely sustain the weight of an old Tithonus like myself, let alone a vigorous young Ajax like you."

Leigh glanced down at his soiled shoes, and smiled with an appreciation of the ironies of life not unlike that which the other had felt so recently. "I came this way for sentimental reasons, I imagine," he replied. "This is a good point from which to look back at the towers."

"Then you've caught the disease too?" the bishop asked. "But one can't long remain an immune in St. George's Hall."

"I shall have plenty of time to recover," Leigh returned, "when I shall have left."

"Yes — yes," the bishop murmured. "I heard something about that. There was an unfortunate misunderstanding, concerning which I believe I can set Dr. Renshaw right. It will give me great pleasure, Mr. Leigh, if you will not think of leaving us."

The overture was practically an admission of his own responsibility in the matter, but the astronomer was only impressed by the fact that for some reason the bishop had ceased to regard him with disfavour. Could it be that he had discovered Felicity's secret at last? A study of the haggard record in the old man's face made the conjecture almost a certainty. Leigh felt that the bishop would now make amends to him for suspecting him falsely in connection with his daughter, and reflected guiltily that the suspicion was not as false as the bishop supposed.

"I have been thinking of leaving — naturally," he answered, hesitating, "but my plans are not yet matured."

The bishop nodded understandingly. He appreciated the fact that the other's sensitiveness and resentment could not be put aside at once, and that his own change of front could not draw forth immediate confidences. The subject was a delicate one to both, and they were mutually anxious to separate.

"I hope you will let me know, then," he said courteously, "whether you decide that your best interests call you elsewhere, but I hope not — I hope not."

He turned his face once more toward the Hall, his sagacious mind already grappling with another possibility. If Felicity must marry after getting her divorce, — and it now seemed wiser that she should, — let her marry this young professor, who was, after all, of her own class. Her fortune would not be wholly alienated from the college interests, should Leigh continue in his professorship. The young man might be made president after Dr. Renshaw's impending retirement. He could take orders to conform with the traditions of the place; and men had taken orders for smaller rewards. His pride in the institution, which his wife must then share, would influence them much in the direction of giving.

Leigh's first words upon coming down the hill had betrayed his growing appreciation of the Hall, his gradual conversion to the ideal of the church college. Though a scientist, he had taken the degree of bachelor of arts, and he was an inheritor of church traditions. As for Felicity — the bishop recalled the times he had seen her with Leigh, and especially at the lecture at Littleford's. He had divined their mutual attraction from the first, though he credited them both with more conscience in the matter than they had shown.

Leigh reached the street and turned southward, following the course that Emmet had taken with his sleigh when he picked Lena up on that very spot some two months before. It wanted yet an hour of his lunch time, and he had come forth with no other thought than to get the fresh air and to turn over again in his mind the plans of which he had hinted to the bishop.

After his interview with Dr. Renshaw, he had written to the authorities of the Lick Observatory and asked permission to join one of the three expeditions that were soon to be sent out to observe the approaching eclipse of the sun. It was too early as yet for a reply, but he had reason to believe that his previous connection with the observatory and his record there would assure the granting of his request, if the number were not entirely completed. Already he imagined himself transported to Norway, or South America, or Egypt. He could not tell which expedition, if any, he would be permitted to join, but of the three, the last named was most to his mind.

Felicity had become interwoven with his consciousness of himself, and in thinking of Egypt he pictured her there with him, a vivid creation of memory and imagination. Some association of ideas between her and the country that had given birth to Cleopatra must have influenced him in his choice, he reflected with a disconsolate smile. The association did Felicity little justice in one way, but the impossibility of imagining her at home on the cold heights of Norway or the Andes showed her kinship with the land of colour and nocturnal mystery.

Sometimes he felt that he must brush aside all opposition of persons and circumstance and beg her to go with him, leaving the world to gape and wonder as it might. It was only a fevered dream, but it suggested another possibility that presently became a definite resolve. At least he would see her again, and beg her not to go blundering back into the arms of the man she did not love. He would plead with her not to try to rectify one mistake by making another more fatal still. Did he not owe it to her and to himself to make one last effort for their happiness? Had he a right to desert her in her trouble, to yield supinely to a conventional prejudice?

He was in the glow of this new resolve when he climbed the hill to the south of the college and turned to follow the road along the ridge which Felicity and Emmet had taken that misty night. At the quarry he paused for a few moments to look down absently at the men working below, and then began to retrace his steps toward the Hall. His turning brought the tower of the college and the distant city before his eyes. The absence of foliage from the trees exposed to view innumerable glinting roofs that were hidden in summer as by a forest. He picked out the tower of St. George's Church and the various steeples with which he had become familiar. Then he caught sight of the pale wings of the figure of Victory above the triumphal column in the park, poised like those of a butterfly about to soar into the still, bright air.

Once more the beauty of the country made its great appeal: the magnificent valleys to east and west swelling upward to ridges of hills clothed in ever changing lights and shadows; the Hall standing sentinel over all; the city nestled below, a city of dreams.

CHAPTER XX

"PUNISHMENT, THOUGH LAME OF FOOT"—

THE bishop sat in his study, awaiting the arrival of Mayor Emmet in a frame of mind that boded ill for the success of the interview. In reply to his letter suggesting a conference on a subject of mutual interest, the mayor had named the third morning as the one that would find him most free from his numerous engagements. The coolness of this reply was exasperating to the bishop, and he thought he divined in the delay a deliberate intention to keep him on the rack of uncertainty. Being a man of ample leisure, he had found plenty of time to formulate the position he meant to take. He and his daughter had threshed out the subject, and now avoided it by mutual consent. Their relationship became unnatural and constrained. They met only at meal-times, and not always then, for each one sought more than one pretext to dine elsewhere. More words on the subject would only precipitate a repetition of the scene that still rankled in the memory of both, and the discussion was therefore closed until Emmet should have stated his own position.

While the situation remained thus stationary, the appearance of the world without had been so completely transformed that a whole season, rather than three days, seemed to have elapsed. Winter had returned in a storm of snow that threatened to assume the proportions of the historic blizzard, which piled such deep drifts about St. George's Hall that the students had leaped with impunity from the upper windows. During the previous night, however, the sky had cleared, and now the air was filled with those familiar brumal sounds, the scraping of shovels and the ringing of sleighbells, that usually make such a pleasant appeal to those within-doors; but the bishop was merely moved to impatient longing for the spring.

The bright sun filled the study with a garish light reflected from the snow without, and the bishop pulled down the heavy shades, introducing thereby an effect of twilight in the room. At the same time the wood fire in the grate, which had previously seemed pale and thin, took on a ruddy and cheerful activity, relieved from the overpowering competition of the sun.

The mayor finally arrived, half an hour behind the time he had appointed, drawn in his sleigh by the pacer that had stood by him so gallantly in his race with Anthony Cobbens. He fastened the mare to the post with careful deliberation, conscious the while that he might be under inspection from behind the drawn curtains of Felicity's room. When he entered the bishop's study, it was evident at once that he came in no very conciliatory mood. The bold glance of his eyes was a trifle more bold than usual and swept the room rapidly, as if he anticipated seeing Felicity there. Something of disappointment and resentment seemed to show itself in his manner, as he took the chair the bishop indicated; and now he waited, with the instinct of the politician, for his opponent to show his hand.

The bishop had always hated this man, and never more so than now. In addition to his special reason for hostility, Emmet's type was one peculiarly distasteful to him. Just as he had catalogued Leigh as a Westerner, and had assumed certain characteristics in him, so he had put Emmet, from the first, into the class of loud-voiced, big-limbed, heavy-heeled centurions. It made no difference that the mayor showed marked deviations from the type; there was just enough of the feminine in his judge to keep him true to his prejudices, and never were they so nearly justified as now. He saw that he must make a beginning, and did so with his usual circumspection. His words were carefully selected to avoid giving offence, but the gist of their meaning was that he waited for his visitor to give an account of himself.

"I should like to speak in the presence of my wife," Emmet announced uncompromisingly.

"My daughter will not be present at this interview," the bishop declared, with marked austerity, "nor at any other interview that may subsequently become necessary, though I hope we shall come to such a satisfactory understanding to-day as to make further conferences superfluous. This arrangement is with her entire consent, or rather, is the fulfilment of her expressed wish. I must protest also against your designation of my daughter as your wife. She is not such in the full sense of the term. She has never appeared with you publicly as your wife, but by her desertion of you at the very altar she emphatically showed that she realised her mistake at once and repudiated it."

"Desertion is no cause for divorce, bishop," Emmet returned, with an ugly gleam in his eyes, "either in your Church or in mine. Your daughter's treatment of me has been such that the only amends she can make is to acknowledge our relationship and act accordingly."

"Come, come, Mr. Emmet," the other retorted, "I need scarcely remind you how far my daughter has already atoned for her mistake by helping you to realise your ambition, by suggesting it, in fact, and by lending you books for your instruction. It seems to me that a manly man would acknowledge this frankly, that he would not strive to hold the woman to the letter of the agreement after discovering that the spirit was no longer there to give it life."

"I could have won without her," the mayor declared hoarsely.

The bishop smiled with exasperating, ironical amusement. "We will waive that point, then, Mr. Emmet. It suggests a fruitless discussion, that would merely serve to distract us from the main question. I was about to say, when you interrupted me, that if you always considered your marriage as binding as you now feign to consider it, you should have come to me and announced the fact. By your acquiescence in my daughter's desertion, you tacitly admitted that you released her, that you had nothing to announce. If you did not consider then that the marriage was binding, you cannot begin to do so at this late hour."

"Allow me to say that your daughter considered it binding," Emmet put in shrewdly. "She did not repudiate her mistake, as you call it, by leaving me at the altar. On the contrary, she intended all along to acknowledge our marriage as soon as I should be elected mayor."

"She did not, perhaps, realise the full significance of her instinctive action," the bishop answered. "A woman is a mystery to herself no less than to others. I am putting the case to you as man to man, hoping to kindle a spark of generous understanding in your heart. Could any woman who really loved a man do as she did? I tell you, and you know, that it was the folly of a romantic girl, a folly that does not deserve the penalty you would inflict. If my daughter did not actually, in so many words, repudiate her mistake in the beginning, she did so in a recent interview with you, and she does so finally now by me."

"And she did me a great wrong!" Emmet cried hotly. "If you are a man, bishop, you must know what it meant to be tricked and disappointed as I was."

The bishop's face grew livid, and he shrank within himself.

"You offer a pitiful excuse, sir!" he retorted. "It depends upon what kind of man you mean — the brute man, who regards women merely as the instruments of his passion, or the chivalrous man, who knows that the woman is the weaker vessel and bears himself accordingly. I confess to you that I am not the former kind."

His eyes assumed a keen, inquisitorial look that required all of Emmet's false fortitude to meet.

"Mr. Emmet, I venture to say that I give you the benefit of a very considerable doubt in assuming that you have not given my daughter statutory grounds for divorce by your conduct with some other woman. It seems passing strange that you should have been so acquiescent under an arrangement which you describe as such a hardship, if you were not kept so by a consciousness of duplicity. But I have no desire to pursue that line of inquiry. This so-called marriage must be dissolved. Let us admit that you have not given statutory grounds; there are other grounds concerning which there exists no manner of doubt whatever. I do not speak now of the eternal fitness of things, of those humane and ethical considerations to which I find you impervious, but of legal grounds. My daughter cannot bring an action for non-support against you, because she left you voluntarily. It remains for you to institute proceedings of divorce against her on the ground of desertion. We will not defend the suit."

There was something almost clairvoyant in the bishop's guess of the mayor's infidelity, for pride had caused Felicity to keep Lena out of her confession. She had told only as much as she chose to tell, leaving her father to imagine himself in possession of all the facts. Had she told all, she would have strengthened her case at the expense of her pride; but this was a sacrifice she could not bring herself to make.

Before the bishop finished speaking, his listener had discerned that the veiled accusation was a guess, and nothing more. This knowledge helped him to remain apparently unmoved. It did more. It showed him Felicity's pride in remaining silent concerning a rival so much beneath her. This had been her attitude all along, — to consider Lena beneath contempt, — and he burned to make her suffer for it. He was filled with fury against himself also for yielding at the last to his passion for Lena, after a long and successful struggle. It was this that made it impossible for him to say plainly that he would not give Felicity up, though he had tormented her father by implying it. This method of revenge was the only one now left him.

"But your religion," he suggested, with a sneer.

"Excuse me," the bishop returned, with patient dignity, "if I feel that I am not accountable to you for the manner in which I defend or fail to defend the canons of my Church. My daughter acts as an individual who is of age, and her reckoning is with the civil law. To clear up your evident confusion of mind, I will explain that I violate no canons of the Church in eliminating myself officially from the situation. I am merely suggesting to you, as one individual to another, a way out of a most unhappy complication. Besides, you evade the hard fact that this was no marriage in the full sense of the word."

Emmet realised that his shaft had fallen short, and the knowledge stung him to fury.

"I will not bring any such action!" he cried recklessly, rising in white heat. "I will not release her!"

"We shall accomplish nothing by violence," the bishop interposed. "Pray, resume your chair and hear me out. A marriage without love is a mere mockery and sham. You do not love my daughter, and she does not love you. We will not argue about that, if you please, for it is not possible to contradict an evident fact. You are an ambitious man, and marriage is only one of the ways by which ambition can be furthered. In this case, the marriage is out of the question; but if you will name a compensation which you deem adequate recompense for your disappointment, we shall be ready to listen to the proposition."

Emmet had taken his seat at the bishop's request, but this cynical proposal to buy him off caused him to spring to his feet again in an indignation that was not altogether unjustified. He was a money-maker himself, and had not coveted Felicity's wealth. From her he had sought only social advantage and revenge upon his enemies; but it was his pride to be the builder of his own fortune.

"If you were not an old man," he said tempestuously, "you would not make such an offer with impunity. You will find I have no price. I wish you good day."

"Wait!" the bishop cried, raising his trembling hand and clearing his throat from suffocating emotion. "Only one word more. You shall not have her — that is all. And this house is mine — you shall not enter it again."

The other's face became diabolical in its passion. He leaned against the jamb of the open door and folded his arms mockingly, as if inviting an effort to eject him.

"You were speaking pretty freely of statutory grounds," he said, raising his voice. "It has n't occurred to you, perhaps, that I may name a co-respondent myself. You ought to have a care, bishop, what kind of professors you employ in your college." With these words he turned and strode from the house.

The bishop's speechless indignation presently gave way to the first touch of pity he had yet felt for Felicity in her trouble. The mayor was more of a brute than even he had thought possible, and should receive no quarter in the future. The front door had scarcely closed when his daughter's figure took the place her husband had just occupied before him.

"Well?" she asked simply.

He searched her face with haggard eyes, and guessed from its pallor that his fears were justified.

"Did you hear what the fellow said," he demanded—"his last words?"

The colour came back to her cheeks with a rush. "I could n't very well help it. I was in the dining-room, and the door was open."

"I 'm sorry," he murmured, "very sorry. I hoped you did not. But there, we 'll not discuss the subject any more at present, Felicity. The interview was fruitless, worse than fruitless, I fear." He shifted uneasily in his chair, and she understood his dumb appeal to be left alone.

When she had gone, he arose from his seat and unlocked a long drawer beneath one of his bookcases, from which he took a mass of material relating to the plans for St. George's Hall. These he spread out on the desk before him and studied with deep attention, turning again to this dream with an instinct of self-preservation. To-morrow he would take up again the fight for his daughter's freedom and happiness, but now he was in sore need of some narcotic influence, of something beautiful and permanent, as a refuge from the passions that had threatened to overpower him. Felicity would live this down; it would ultimately seem but a stormy day in the retrospect. Meanwhile, what could he do about this chapel? Here, in this envelope, was a promise of half the money needed, if he could raise the balance within a specified time. He recalled having read in the morning paper of the arrival from Europe of an old friend and former parishioner. She was a rich woman, and was now alone in the world. Perhaps he could get away in a few days and run down to New York to see her. He began to drum absently on the desk with his fingers, turning over in his mind some details in the arrangement of the chapel which he had never settled to his satisfaction. Presently he realised that something was lacking, and reaching forward, he took a cigar from the open box that stood on the revolving bookcase near by.

It was noon when the mayor returned to the City

Hall. On the steps, as he entered, stood a figure long familiar in the streets of Warwick, a blind newsvender, with his cane and smoked glasses and bundle of papers. In the morning, he might be seen at the railroad station, a grotesque and patient form, holding out his papers silently in the direction of the shuffling feet that passed by. He never cried his wares, but his appeal was more compelling than the noisy shouts of his more fortunate competitors. He had become an institution in Warwick. Every one knew where to find him at certain hours: in the morning, at the station; toward noon, taking his way, unassisted except by his cane, toward the City Hall, carrying the first edition of a great metropolitan daily of the flaming variety; in the evening, at the station once more. He had made these two posts of vantage his own, as unfortunates in the Old World take possession of sunny corners beside cathedral doors, and no one ventured to trespass within his sphere.

Each noon Emmet had been accustomed to buy a paper, paying a nickel or a dime as it came to his hand, but seldom the penny that was the price of the sheet. To-day he followed his custom mechanically and hurried on, eager to plunge into the distraction of work as a refuge from the tormenting devil within him. The outer office, lined with chairs for visitors and adorned with pictures of former occupants of the mayoralty, was deserted. He passed into the inner office, where his desk stood, piled with the last mail, and sent his stenographer out to lunch, for his own appetite had deserted him.

He had thrown the paper down, with no thought of reading it, and paused to hang up his coat and hat. Upon his return, he was confronted by a black headline in letters two inches deep, and flinging the paper open with a sharp crackle, he stood rigid while the meaning of it burst upon him.

PRETTY MAID MARRIES RICH SWELL!

ROMANTIC RUNAWAY MATCH. YOUNG HOLLISTER PYLE OF WARWICK MARRIES THE GIRL THAT FORMERLY LIVED IN HIS HOUSE. CUPID NOT TO BE BAFFLED BY THE DIFFERENCE IN SOCIAL POSITION. PARENTS OF BRIDEGROOM TELEGRAPH THEIR FORGIVENESS.

Emmet slowly sank into his chair, his staring eyes fixed on the page while he rapidly ran through the startling story—not a seven days' wonder, indeed, in these times of universal publicity, but the gossip of a few hours, until the whirling sheets of the next issue should fling some other story of folly or crime into the hands of its gaping readers.

But Emmet was not comforted by a realisation of the transitory nature of the sensation. He heard the newsboys in the street without, crying it hoarsely, and almost wondered why his own name was not coupled with the others, to be bruited about the sidewalks, proclaiming his guilt. In the first moments, his sensations were those of fear and horror. The bottom had dropped out of his world, leaving him suspended over an abyss. He experienced no relief that this act of Lena's freed his own hands. He was free in one sense, but she had fastened a crime upon him forever by taking herself from his path.

What he had intended to do, he did not know. Some vague idea of providing for her had lain dormant in his mind. He had even gone to the bishop's with a subconscious disposition to give Felicity up; but her father's scorn had aroused his perversity, and had resulted in a declaration of obstinacy that was unpremeditated.

Now he knew that he had loved Lena, had intended to stand by her, even to marry her; and he was struck by her pitiful humility. Evidently it had not occurred to her mind that he might get a divorce. Too late he wished he had been frank with her and had asked her to wait. In reality, he was no sensualist, and Lena's frailty had not made him a cynic; on the contrary, he regarded it as a proof of her love alone. In his agony, he did not judge her; he judged only himself. He had taught her duplicity, but he was aghast at her skill in practising the lesson she had learned. During all this time, he had received no hint that young Pyle had followed her from his house. He could only imagine the facts. When Lena left that place to go to Bishop Wycliffe's, she doubtless had an honest desire to escape from the unwelcome attentions she had told him of. She must have begun to weaken only after discovering that the man for whom she made the effort had played her false.

Emmet threw down the paper with a groan and turned to his desk, moved by a desperate hope that he could force himself to appreciate the reality of the interests those piled envelopes represented. He seized them feverishly, and began to shuffle them over like a pack of cards. His random glance was arrested by a thin, wavering hand he knew well, scrawled on an envelope that bore the picture and name of a New York hotel. Had he been a student of chirography, he might have read the secret of the enigma that tormented him in those pale, uncertain pen-strokes, so unlike the firm, compact characters by which Miss Wycliffe visualised her will. But his only thought was that this letter came to him as a final explanation and farewell, after he had lost her forever.

The epistle was confused, and blotted with tears. She told how Pyle had pursued her, how she had resisted him, how she had finally yielded to his importunities, to shield the man that had wronged her and to save herself. If she had not done this, she would have killed herself, but she was afraid to die, and there was no third way. She wrote no word of reproach, but closed with a final message of love and a prayer for his happiness.

Emmet shrank from the lines, as if each were the waving lash of a whip that descended upon him. When he had finished reading, he tore the letter into minute fragments and threw them in the basket. His heart was swelling with the sense of a tragedy that was not completed, but only begun, a tragedy that he and Lena must share together. She had bound him to her forever by putting this barrier between them. He thought of Felicity only to resolve to free himself from her at once, that he might be in readiness to come to Lena's aid in the future, should she need him. Perhaps God would yet give him a chance to make amends. If her husband would only break his worthless neck in one of his mad rushes with his machine, Emmet reflected savagely, or drink himself to death —

Any moment some one might come in and find him there. He got up and locked the door against intrusion before he should be able to master the outward signs of his emotion. Then he returned to his chair and looked about, thinking confusedly. There was something pitiless in the glaring light of noon that disclosed every crack and stain on the ugly brown walls. It was like the relentless light of his new revelation turned upon the stains and patches of his soul, dreary and terrible. Had the hour been twilight, some glamour of lost romance and self-pity might have fallen upon him like a violet veil, hiding the sordid truth; but he lacked the imagination with which artistic natures may shield themselves, and he saw things as they were. He even wandered momently from his own misery to reflect that he would have this room refitted and painted a more cheerful hue, whether for himself or for his successor. The office was beneath the dignity of a city like Warwick.

He picked up the paper and spread it out before him once more, quivering sensitively at the flippant and vulgar tone of the announcement. That "pretty maid" was just Lena to him, whom he had loved in secret, now haled before the tribunal of public opinion. His sensations could scarcely have been more keen, had he also been billed before the gaping crowd. The fact that he was not so billed made him realise what a small part of any secret ever reaches the general ear. The plant is pulled up for inspection, but the deeper roots remain behind, hidden in the earth.

There was the elder Pyle, a dignified man, with a war record, who had been one of the committee that thrust the mayor of Warwick aside as unworthy to welcome the President. Here was a strange, unmeditated revenge! Emmet, through Lena, had done much to wreck the happiness of that household. His deed had gotten away from him, and was working on and on, beyond his power to recall, passing from one social class into another as through a familiar medium. The mayor's straight lines of demarcation between classes became blurred; he saw them shift and waver and disappear, till the whole seemed a confused mass of humanity, confluent and interchangeable.

His only desire now was to make reparation, and reparation was denied him. His success had been so steadily progressive, his growing appreciation of his own power so intoxicating, that he had somehow felt he could control this situation also. Even Felicity had not been beyond him, had he chosen to assert himself. But Lena, — so gentle and acquiescent, — it was she who had taken the bit in her teeth and done this astounding thing!

It would be a relief, he reflected, if he could make open confession and begin life over again, or run away from the daily reminder of his sin; but he must remain where he was, and steel himself to see Lena unmoved, a man with an abiding shadow.

CHAPTER XXI

THE MAYOR FINDS HIMSELF AT LAST

IT was between three and four o'clock in the afternoon of the same day, and the sun still shone dazzlingly on the deep, unblemished snow. All morning long, the janitors of the Hall had been toiling through the drifts with their shovels, leaving a narrow pathway behind them from the southern extremity of the building to the street at the end of the maple walk. Now, their heads and shoulders had ceased to rise and fall above the bleak expanse.

Instead, a solitary figure could be seen advancing in the direction of the college, seeming from a distance to be that of a child, and reminding one of Little Red Riding-Hood in the fairy tale. The height of the side walls of snow aided the distance in producing this illusion. Upon coming nearer, one would have seen the child gradually assume the stature of a woman, and had he been a citizen of Warwick, he would have recognised Felicity Wycliffe.

Although, as a general thing, women were not wont to pass that way, except to attend the chapel services of a Sunday or some public ceremony, the bishop's daughter was free of the grounds by peculiar rights, which no one dreamed of questioning. A group of students, meeting her halfway, leaped gallantly into the snow waist-deep to let her pass, and did not presume to question her mission or destination.

The wind had already begun to sift the fine snow into the bottom of the trench, increasing the difficulty of her progress, and forming innumerable little rifts and scallops in the white dunes that swelled upward toward the skyline like the sands of the sea. Suddenly she heard the harsh cawing of a flock of crows that passed overhead, wheeling westward. The sound caused her heart to vibrate with a memory of that wonderful October afternoon when she had listened with Leigh to the same notes beneath the pines, and she shaded her eyes against the sun to watch the course of the flock across the wide basin of the valley. The notes grew less and less, no longer streperous but strangely musical, and finally were heard no more, leaving her oppressed by a sense of loneliness and desertion. Something akin to an antique mood fell upon her, as if she had been given an augury of an irreversible fate.

This spiritual quiescence, numbing her from a realisation of her purpose, held until she disappeared into the huge archway of the tower and began to ascend the narrow stairs. But here her spirit failed her, and she paused. Standing motionless in the gloom, she could hear her heart beating wildly, and the folly of her intention became apparent. But the momentum of her original purpose presently urged her on, it seemed against her will and better judgement, until she stood before Leigh's half-open door. Had the door been closed, she might not have been able to bring herself to knock, she might have turned and departed as silently as she had come; but there was an invitation in this accidental circumstance, to which the gleam of an open fire gave warmth and persuasion.

Listening intently, she heard no sound from within. The few students she had met on the hillside were the only ones she had seen, and she guessed that the majority were still detained by their recitations. At the end of the hour, he would doubtless return from a class. There was time for her to recall what she wished to say and how she would begin. Reassured by this reflection, she was about to enter, when the door on the other side of the hall opened, and she turned to see Cardington's tall figure against the light from within.

"I was listening for your step, Miss Felicity," he said, "having observed your approach from my corner window, but you came as quietly as a snowflake. This is an unexpected honour. It 's a long time since I have had the pleasure of a call from you; in fact, not since those days of blessed memory when you were a little girl, and used to run up to take a look at my pictures. But come in. Perhaps I can make you a cup of afternoon tea."

She followed him into the room, and said nothing until he had closed the door behind her. Then she flung back her hood with a sweep of her hand and met his gaze steadily.

"You know I did n't come to see you, don't you?" she demanded with quiet defiance.

"Far be it from me," he temporised, "to assume accurate knowledge of anything as doubtful as the direction a charming young woman's favour may take; but I thought it possible — I thought it possible — for old sake's sake."

The repetition of the reminder touched her, in spite of her preoccupation, and she glanced about the once familiar room with a wistful kindling of the eyes.

"I used to come up here often, did n't I?" she mused. "And father knew where to find me when he had finished his smoke and talk with the boys. There 's the same old picture of the Alhambra you used to tell me stories about." Her defiance was gone now, though her purpose still held. "But I did n't come to see you this time; I shall — soon. I came to see some one else."

"My dear child," he said, fixing her with a gaze of deep concern, "I am old enough to be your father, am I not?"

She nodded silently, waiting for the lecture she felt she so well deserved. Yet it was characteristic of their relationship that she experienced no serious apprehension; she was too well aware of his understanding and indulgence for that.

"But still," he continued, "I lack a few years of reaching the imposing longevity of Methuselah."

She put out her hands in impulsive protest against this reference to their difference in age, understanding the pain that underlay his effort at jocularity. He took and retained them in his own, and his colour deepened.

"This is a most embarrassing demonstration of affection," he commented. "If any one should suddenly open the door, I fear his surprise would be very great. Now, is it not fortunate that my room is opposite that of my young colleague, rather than the room of some other person less well disposed, less a friend, I may say, to you both?"

"I'm sure it is," she answered. "If any one else had been living in this room, I would never have ventured" —

"Exactly. No one else, perhaps, has had my opportunities for understanding you. Now, on the basis of our long acquaintance, and because of my deep attachment to yourself and your father, I wish to urge you to reconsider your intention of making any other call this afternoon."

"I shall have to use my own judgement," she returned, without flinching. "I am in great perplexity — you don't know."

"I do know," he retorted, "and perhaps the time has come for me to tell you so. A wanderer like myself comes across many unexpected things in the course of his peregrinations. Shall I tell you how, while looking for some records of my family in an old New York church, secretly indulging the genealogical mania I am wont to deride, I lighted upon a record I did not think to find — the record of the marriage of one who is very dear to me?"

"Then you knew all the time! I almost thought so — often."

"Not all the time," he corrected, "though for what seemed a very long time, while I waited for the bolt to fall on your father's unsuspecting head. Perhaps, Felicity, you will accept it as a proof of my devotion to you that I did not consider it my duty to enlighten your father. If I can be of any assistance to you even now — but I am an outsider. I merely wish to assure you of my unswerving — friendship."

"Don't make me cry," she protested, with a shaken little laugh. She bit her lip and winked back the starting tears. "Father knows now — and you know — and I am going to tell Mr. Leigh."

"Well, well," he answered, "I say no more." His eyes searched her face earnestly, and he began to shake her hands, which he had retained in his own from the time she put them there. "You must redeem your promise to come and see me again, I hope under happier circumstances." He flung open the door with suspicious haste, and bowed her out in his ceremonious way.

She found herself facing the same beckoning firelight, with the same reassuring silence about her. In addition she felt a new comfort and an unexpected permission from the recent interview. Without further hesitation, she stepped across the threshold and quietly closed the door behind her.

She was still somewhat shaken by the emotions she had just experienced, but this change of scene brought different sensations and dried her tears. Her first feeling was one of intense relief. Here she was, whether wisely or not she could not tell, but she was glad she had come. She advanced to the centre of the room, and gazed about her at the objects that were his. The first thing that always struck her in any room was its pictures, and here she saw a number of famous astronomers and mathematicians, stiffly arranged in chronological order. There were no Venetian scenes or cathedrals, but above the fireplace she saw an etching of the library of his *alma mater*, surmounted by his college flag.

What a contrast to the room she called her own! The very atmosphere was different, for mingled with the odour of burning logs she detected a suggestion of tobacco smoke, so faint that only a woman would have perceived it. The simplicity of the place, the absence of ornate decoration, was like him, she reflected. Artistic herself to an exceptional degree, she had never cared for men who possessed an equal knowledge of such things; they were either professional artists, or somehow less than manly.

She was familiar with the rooms of St. George's Hall, and knew to a nicety what furniture and pictures and hangings were best suited to the suggestions inherent in the deep stone windows, the small, leaded panes, the massive fireplaces. Of these things she saw no examples; but on the large desk, littered with a profusion of books and pipes and papers, her glance was arrested by the sight of several candlesticks of various sizes and of beautiful workmanship. She was struck by this as by a psychological singularity, and counted the number — four on the table and three others on the mantel, seven in all, the number freighted with so many religious associations. She wondered whether there were some astronomical association also. Were there seven stars in the Pleiades?

She went to the window and stood looking out at the shadow of the Hall, creeping more rapidly now toward the edge of the plateau. The austere gloom of the scene, the strange, red light of the sunset striking across the eastern valley to the vague blue hills on the horizon, were unutterably sad, and her desolate mood returned, shot through by fear as the time of his arrival became a matter of moments. What was she to say to him? What would he think? Was there yet time to change her mind and make her escape?

Suddenly the voices of students were heard below and the crunching of their steps along the path. She had lingered too long and must abide the issue, for presently she heard him coming up the stairs. Then she thought that if he was buoyant, if he entered light-heartedly, she would leave without a word, cured of her fancy that he loved her. The door opened slowly, and she remained motionless where she stood, her hands resting on the cold stone window-ledge, her eyes fixed intently on the distant hills. But all her senses were conscious of him. She felt that she could see him, that he too was sad, that she heard him sigh, though the only sound in the room during his moment of speechless surprise was the purring of the flames in the fireplace.

"Miss Wycliffe," he ventured doubtfully.

Remembering his experience in the mist, he had almost believed that he was again the victim of an hallucination, but her swift turning, her illuminating smile, were very different from that ghostly vanishing.

"How extraordinary you will think it of me, Mr. Leigh," she said, coming toward him, "to call on you in this fashion." She stood near him, her hands involved in the folds of her cloak, her bearing one of spontaneity and candour. He pulled off his cap and stood waiting. None of the conventional greetings passed between them. He did not even ask her to be seated, so great was his bewilderment, his anxiety to know why she had come. The emotion that had stirred her in Cardington's room seemed gone now. Her smile conveyed an humorous appreciation of her unconventional act. The gaze of her eyes was spiritual and clear.

"I have come to you as to a friend," she explained with sweet seriousness. "You know the trouble I have brought upon myself, upon my father, upon Mr. Emmet, upon every one. I am in great distress of mind. I want to do the right thing, if it is possible to right so much wrong at this late date. I have become confused as to my duty. My husband thinks one thing — my father thinks another — and I don't know what I ought to do. You have been in Mr. Emmet's confidence and in mine. I want you to give me your advice."

"Perhaps you should have chosen a more disinterested judge, Miss Wycliffe," he returned; "but you were right at least in feeling that you could come to me as to a friend. In fact, I was thinking of coming to you, perhaps not altogether as a mere friend — but let that go now. Why should n't one who would have been something nearer, if it had been possible, be at least that? And more — I am grateful to you for giving me this opportunity. I take it as a proof that you have restored me in some measure to your confidence, after I had deserved to lose it entirely."

In reality, there had been no doubt in her mind in regard to her husband, though possibly she would have denied, even to herself, that her decision was formed before she came with the problem to the man that loved her. It was not her duty to Emmet that distressed her, but whether Leigh loved her still. This was what she wished to know, and now his manner told her more than his words.

"Don't say you deserved to lose my confidence," she protested quickly. "It was I who deserved to lose yours."

The attitude her coming demanded of him was cruelly difficult to maintain, and he sought help from action.

"We'll let bygones be bygones, then," he answered brusquely; but his brusqueness pleased her. "Take this chair by the fire."

"The question is one of duty," she began again.

He flung himself into another chair on the opposite side of the fireplace, locked his fingers about one knee, and regarded her judicially, as if his whole mind were concentrated upon the problem she was stating. In reality, he was absorbed by the extraordinary nature of the situation, and lost in admiration of the picture she presented. Were she posing for a portrait to be painted, she could not have chosen her position more effectively. The firelight brought out a golden tone from her brown skirt. It was lost in the softness of her velvet waist and hair, to reappear mysteriously in her eyes. She had thrown her crimson cloak over the back of the chair, and it formed a rippling band of colour on each side of her figure. Surely, here was a Portrait of a Lady that would have made an artist famous, could he have done it to the life.

She spoke of her struggle with Emmet as if she were stating an hypothetical case for his dispassionate consideration. Her apparent coolness filled him with amazement, but he recognised that she had adopted the only attitude that could justify the interview and preserve her own dignity. His emotions were held in suspension; he even felt he had none, so compelling was the effect of her serious and impersonal frankness. Yet he saw she was not really frank with him. She omitted entirely to mention certain elements in the situation which she must have known that he knew from her husband's confession to him.

His eyes, fixed upon her own, were filled with speculation, and he was unconscious of the inquisitorial effect they produced upon her. He was thinking how very different she was from what he had at first supposed, and how this gradual opening of his eyes to hitherto unsuspected vistas of her character had not changed for one moment the fact of his love for her. She might vacillate and doubt, — she seemed to do so now, — but questionings, retreats, advances, refusals, were for women.

Finally, she spoke of the possibility of going back to Emmet, and he felt that he could not bear it. It was this very thing which he had decided to protest against, and now his opportunity had come. Every word tortured him, filled him with fury against her for the folly of such a sacrifice, with fury also against the fate that forbade him to plead his own cause and to open her eyes to her husband's motives. He arose from his chair and began to pace the room feverishly, tempted each moment to pause, to throw himself at her feet, and to beg her to love him alone. Would he only lose her thus, and gain her contempt as well?

Felicity ceased speaking, looked into the fire with a musing and thoughtful gaze, smoothing absently the fingers of her gloves, and waited for the opinion she had asked him to give. She was more than satisfied now, even a little afraid of the possible expression of the love she had wished to prove. She had tempted him once before, and he had yielded; now she was making another impossible demand upon his self-restraint, calmly asking him to ignore the truth of their own relationship while she discussed her false duty to another. Suddenly he stood before her, and she looked up to encounter his eyes, which seemed to burn with a blue flame in the intensity of his emotion.

"You can't be so foolish as to go back to him!" he cried. "I tell you, Felicity, it 's worse than folly — it 's wickedness. I love you, and he does n't — I won't let him have you!"

"Oh, don't!" she protested, rising hurriedly in her turn. "I ought not to have come — how dark it has grown! — I must be going. What shall I do? He refuses to give me up, and — and I am afraid of him!"

The scene on the edge of the cliff had come back to her mind with new and terrible force, all the more portentous as she seemed now to have seen her way of escape made clear. And her husband's face in the moonlight, when she fled from him in panic into the house! Finally, his parting threat that very morning, in which he had involved this man whom she loved. Leigh's arm went about her, and her head rested against his breast. He bent over her, intoxicated by the fragrance of her hair and kissing it passionately.

"All questions and doubts are solved in this," he murmured. "It is different this time, is it not, my darling? What is the use of more words? We understand each other now." He held her from him. "Look up into my eyes," he commanded, with reckless exultation. "Your eyes blind me; how wonderful they are! Do you know what I was thinking, all the time you were talking to me about Emmet? I was n't half listening — I was imagining that you were my wife and not his, sitting with me by the fire. I allowed myself to see things, not as they were, but as they ought to be, as they shall be!"

"I was a proud woman once," she faltered, "but I have no right to be proud any more. If you will only understand me, if you will only love me always as you do now, I shall not care for anything else. Tell me you were to blame, too, and save me some remnant of my self-respect."

"Blame!" he echoed contemptuously. "See, my darling, how I kiss away your tears. Poor child, so storm-tossed, so troubled! Have we not dealt enough with words, while all the time this was the only reality? Can you talk of blame on either side, Felicity, when we love each other as we do?" In that moment of happiness he could not bring himself to tell her of the letter in his pocket that gave him permission to join the expedition to Egypt. He had still a few days to spare, and though he was resolved to go, he would not throw the shadow of separation over their first perfect understanding. That very afternoon he had arranged with Dr. Renshaw for his substitute, and had made his final plans. He would have gone to her to-morrow with the news, but now he would wait until to-morrow before he spoke.

Silence had fallen between them when they heard the sound of footsteps ascending the stairs, buoyant and determined. They might be directed to Cardington's room across the way, but the two listeners stood as if frozen, waiting with strange foreboding for the issue. Then came a loud knocking on the door.

They stood apart, and looked at each other with mute irresolution. The knock was repeated, and before they could fortify themselves to meet the crisis, the door opened and Emmet advanced boldly into the dim light of the fire. Leigh stepped quickly between him and Felicity.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion, Mr. Emmet?" he asked quietly.

The bishop's daughter seemed to grow taller with scorn of the vulgar outbreak and unseemly charges she believed to be inevitable, but her husband raised his hand as if to ward off resentment, and Leigh saw in a glance that he was no longer the man he had known. There was little now of that bold, insistent personality which had once radiated a compelling sense of power. His face seemed thinner, finer, almost luminous with his purpose of renunciation. He looked at Leigh with none of the fury of the outraged husband in his eyes, but rather with a suggestion of sympathy and understanding.

"I 've been to the bishop's," he began abruptly. "I wanted to see him and Felicity once more to take back all I said this morning, and to say I would do as they wished. They were n't at home, and I guessed somehow they might be here. Anyhow, even if they were n't, I wanted you to know, Mr. Leigh, that I 'd given Felicity up. Never mind why, — that 's my affair, — but it 's right for every one concerned. I 'll not be the dog in the manger any longer. You were intended for her, and she for you. I knew it long ago, though I would n't admit it; and after all this trouble is over, you 'll be happy together" — His voice died away, and having taken a step aside to bring Felicity within range of his vision, he stood looking from one to the other with an expression which prophesied the spiritual aloofness he might one day attain.

"Felicity," he said, "you 'll not have reason to fear me any more. It 's clear sailing for us both now. And don't reproach yourself. The account is more than square. You 've not been as much to blame as I have, — be sure of that."

It seemed, however, to be more with Leigh than with Felicity that he was concerned at the last, and he shook hands with him lingeringly, as if he would show that under happier circumstances, had a woman not come between them, they would have been the friends they were meant to be. The astronomer felt this, as if the message had been spoken, and followed his visitor to the door with scarcely articulate words of appreciation. But Emmet, having accomplished his purpose, was anxious to be gone, and making his exit with unceremonious haste, he ran rapidly down the stairs.

He had not reached the northern end of the Hall before two other figures emerged from the blackness of the archway into the snowy twilight and turned in the same direction. Felicity had not allowed herself to remain a moment longer than was necessary, with Leigh, after her husband's departure; he had returned from seeing his visitor to the door to find her cloaked and ready. He appreciated the situation too well to attempt to detain her, or even to comment upon Emmet's extraordinary change of front and her impending freedom. He knew that she too, like himself, was crushed by her husband's magnanimity, and that all mention of love between them was an impossibility for the time. While their love seemed hopeless, he had kissed her in wild revolt and farewell, but now he found it possible to wait. He experienced a curious joy in a realisation of the fact that she fell short of the perfection he had once assumed in her. From her faults he took heart of grace, and was saved from being overpowered by her beauty.

As he looked at Emmet's sturdy figure plunging on before them, now lost in shadow, now passing through a bar of light that shone from a student's window, he wondered at the man's surrender of one who was to him a treasure-house into which were gathered all the beauty and mystery and fascination of women. The future held much of uncertainty for him, but his love was safe.

This final act of the drama, which was, after all, only the centrepiece of a trilogy, built on a drama acted before Leigh's entrance to the scene, and promising another in the future, was played more below the surface than above. Not one tenth of the things that might have been said was actually spoken; the greater part was unexpressed, perhaps unexpressible. But to the young astronomer, Nature herself, never wholly mute, was full of interpretative music. If the wind was ever a paean of victory, it was such to him as they emerged from the shelter of the Hall and received the full force of its robust and joyful blast; if the familiar stars ever sang in their courses, they sang to him now. From time to time his hand met that of the woman he loved in a clinging touch, as he turned to help her through a drift that had risen since she passed that way, and this progress seemed to his warm imagination an allegory of their future life together.

They neared the end of the maple walk, and the mayor's dark figure became partially obscured by the bulk of his waiting sleigh. The next moment he was standing upright within it, arranging the blanket about him, seeming larger than human against the whiteness beyond. He sank into his seat and gathered up the reins. They heard him speak to his horse in his confidential way; there was a cheerful burst of silvery bells, and the sleigh began to move rapidly down the hill.

As Leigh watched the vanishing figure, his heart was smitten by a keen regret, for he felt that a man of heroic quality, known only when lost, was passing out of his life forever.

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